

Screen



Special Latin American issue

The Argentine female solidarity film

Cinema Novo in Brazil

Imperfect Cinema in Cuba

Mexican melodrama

Special debate: Third Cinema/Television

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Danzón (María Novaro, Mexico, 1991).
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Camera solidaria

CATHERINE GRANT

Don't you think it's very difficult for a foreigner to really understand what happened here?

Un muro de silencio

The establishment of a socialist state in Cuba in 1960, and the subsequent escalation of anti-imperialist struggles in most Latin American countries, were inspirational developments for many young Latin Americans and others. As Zuzana Pick writes, 'Progressive artists and intellectuals visited Cuba in this period and spearheaded a vast movement of pan-Latin American solidarity'.¹ The 1967 First International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Viña del Mar launched a similar project of continental solidarity which was taken up by many filmmakers in the late 1960s and 1970s resulting in a raft of politically committed films which circulated both within Latin America and beyond, on the international festival circuit. New Latin American Cinema's project of cultural nationalism within a continental frame was further consolidated into the 1980s, in the aftermath of the Nicaraguan Revolution, continuing anti-imperialist struggles in Central America and the 'dirty wars' in several South American countries which had driven many filmmakers into exile.²

Filmmakers beyond Latin America also seem to have been inspired by these events; a number of Hollywood and independently produced movies were released in the 1980s which dealt with some of them: for example, *Missing* (Costa Gavras, 1982), *Under Fire* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1983), *El Norte* (Gregorio Nava, 1983), *Latino* (Haskell Wexler, 1985), and *Salvador* (Oliver Stone, 1986).³ Most recently, of course, Ken Loach's 1996 plurinational coproduction *Carla's Song* was released. It is possible to argue that these and

1 Zuzana Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: a Continental Project* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 20.

2 See *ibid.*, pp. 29–37.

3 See James Dunkerley's article on these films, '“All that trouble down there”: Hollywood and Central America', in John King et al (eds), *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London: British Film Institute, 1993), pp. 95–103, 95.

4 See Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, pp. 168, 176.

5 B.Ruby Rich, 'An/other view of new Latin American cinema', *Iris*, no. 13 (Summer 1991) 'Latin American Cinema', pp. 5–28, 23.

6 See John King, *Magical Reels: a History of Cinema in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1990), p.93.

7 Nissa Torrents, 'The cinema that never was', in Colin Lewis and Nissa Torrents (eds), *Argentina in the Crisis Years* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1993), pp. 35–51, 35.

other films, drawing on other filmic responses to terror and revolution (the Vietnam film, for instance), are examples of a 'solidarity' subgenre, which aims, amongst other things, to raise awareness about certain political situations. The modest box-office success of some of these films in a number of non-Latin American countries was at least partially due to the international Latin American solidarity movements which were probably at their peak in the 1980s,⁴ but also, in the case of the USA, to the existence of audiences drawn from Chicano and other Latino communities (their ranks swollen by political and economic refugees from Latin America) who have been increasingly targeted by studios and film distributors as a discrete market for film.

Yet while audiences in North America and Europe seemed to exist for political films about Latin America, they suffered a sharp decline in Latin America itself in the late 1980s. Years of political repression and worsening economic difficulties, as the continent moved towards a growing dependence on neoliberal policies and integration in the global capitalist economy, were taking their toll. As B.Ruby Rich wrote in 1989:

The last year of the decade turned out to be a costly one for the continent. Within each country, the economics confronting film production are disastrous: local markets that can no longer return the investment necessary for late 1980s budgets, plans that require international stars and co-production money to get off the ground, movie theaters that are closing down by the hundreds as a combination of videocassette distribution and operating costs make them unprofitable.⁵

In addition to this, particularly in the countries of the Southern Cone, filmmakers seem to have been faced by somewhat reduced possibilities for political and aesthetic freedom in a changed context where the old forms of oppositional political activism, and therefore of some of the non-commercial production and distribution structures associated with New Latin American Cinema, had in many cases been crushed by years of military rule.

In Argentina, for example, after the military dictatorship of 1976–83, even the attempts by the new democratic government officially to spearhead a national process of cultural renewal encouraged only the production of films which could potentially recoup their investment in the commercial sphere.⁶ In the early years of democracy this strategy was successful on its own terms; the films produced were politically quite plural and the film industry was relatively buoyant. At that time, as Nissa Torrents wrote, 'film expressed collective desires, fears and passions in a way that struck a chord with the public at large'.⁷ As the 1980s progressed, however, and the economic difficulties of the Alfonsín government spiralled into the hyperinflation of 1987–9, film production and ticket sales in

Argentina slumped to worse levels than the lows of the dictatorship years. From the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, the most viable form of making feature films for cinematic release was to seek coproduction finance with television companies or foreign production companies, but there were relatively few such deals on offer. In Argentina, these developments meant that the numbers of commercially funded films which dealt, on any level, with politics went down dramatically.⁸

Understandably, many filmmakers and critics have, to say the least, been very depressed by these developments. As B. Ruby Rich writes, international coproductions in particular run the risk of removing 'political specificity' from the films produced and at times promote 'a traditional, essentially conservative, form of authorship'.⁹ Perhaps because of the lack of enthusiasm for this practice, few of the films produced in this way have been analysed in any detail as 'coproductions'. Zuzana Pick has come very close to doing this in her admirable examination of, amongst others, some of the early 1980s films of Fernando Solanas and Raúl Ruíz (both at that time exiled in France) as 'Cinemas of Exile and Displacement'.¹⁰ But, in general, this has been an underexplored area.

This article assumes that there is a great deal more to be said about the relationship between international coproductions and the national cinemas they draw on (both aesthetically and economically) beyond the superficial and dismissive comments they often elicit about the 'dangers' of transnational hybridity. In particular, I would like to take a closer look at two Argentine 'solidarity films' (one made by an 'insider' and one by an 'outsider') which have been coproduced in recent years with European countries in order to examine in detail the tropes of 'foreignness' and 'nativeness' (and the possibilities for solidarity between the two) which are often central to the plots and film aesthetics of casting, language and locations in such films. In this way, I hope to make a contribution to wider debates about coproduction, and about cultural translation in contemporary cinema culture in general.¹¹

The two films I wish to discuss – *La amiga/The Female Friend* (Jeanine Meerapfel, Argentina/West Germany, 1989) and *Un muro de silencio/Black Flowers: a Wall of Silence* (Lita Stantic, Argentina/Mexico/UK, 1993) also raise questions about the complex processes by which "social climates" are translated into cinematic signifieds'.¹² These questions are ones which are further complicated by the coproduction process which attempts to translate national social and political climates (in these two films, the Argentina of the 'dirty war' years and the transition to democracy) into cinematic signifieds aiming at 'appealing' not just to national but to international cinema audiences. As Mette Hjört writes:

To be a member of a minor culture is to encounter the problematic nature of publics, for inferior status within a hierarchy

8 Ximena Triquell, in a detailed survey of these developments in Argentine film production cites that of the 107 Argentine films produced between 1984 and 1986, seventy per cent have political themes associated with the military dictatorship and its aftermath. Of the sixty films made between 1987 and 1989, only three dealt directly with this still very 'live' issue (including *La amiga*). Of the forty-five films in production between 1990 and 1992, only one dealt with the 'dirty war': *Un muro de silencio*. 'Cine y discurso social en Argentina post-dictadura', *Leeds Iberian Papers*, forthcoming 1997. I am grateful to her for sharing this research with me in advance of publication.

9 Rich, 'An/other view', p. 23.

10 Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, pp. 155–85.

11 A key text in these debates is Mette Hjört, 'Danish cinema and the politics of recognition', in David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (eds), *Past Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 520–32.

12 Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 131.

13 Hjört, 'Danish Cinema', p. 521.

14 Ibid.

15 Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 18.

16 Mary Louise Pratt, 'Women, literature, and national brotherhood', in Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latin America (ed.), *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 48–73.

of cultures is directly linked to attitudes of public indifference or overt disdain. It would appear that in the case of minor cultures, lack of interest is expressed, not by one, but by multiple publics, only some of which are located outside the boundaries of the nation-state.¹³

These problems of cultural imperialism, cinema audiences' tastes and what Hjört calls 'cultural salience' within the international sphere,¹⁴ operate together, I would argue, as 'regimes of truth', 'encased in institutional structures that exclude specific voices, esthetics and representations'.¹⁵ Yet, like other (Foucauldian) regimes of truth, they do not simply function to repress but also, on occasion, to produce new, hybrid cultural forms. In particular, in the case of the two films I shall discuss here, generic forms and elements taken from a popular tradition of cinema for mass entertainment mix with the more conventional aesthetics of political filmmaking which characterized New Latin American Cinema, for example. In other words, these and other Argentinian political films made during the 1980s and early 1990s interestingly adopt similar aesthetic strategies to those of the 'solidarity films' I mentioned earlier, the ones made in the 1980s about Latin America by US and European filmmakers. There is, however, one significant difference that I must address, and that is the question of gender.

In an essay on nineteenth-century literary representations of Argentine women, Mary Louise Pratt makes a passing comment about Luis Puenzo's 1985 film, *La historia oficial/The Official Version*: '[This film] bears witness to the current emergence of new female political and historical subjects in Latin America, in mothers' movements and other powerfully innovative, often cross-class forms of female activism'.¹⁶ Here, Pratt invokes the campaign by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who have demonstrated almost every Thursday since 1977 to demand the safe return of their sons and daughters presumed to be among the thousands of people 'disappeared' at the hands of the military authorities between 1976 and 1983. Pratt's general observation on *La historia oficial* is true of a small number of other films produced in Argentina in the aftermath of the military dictatorship, which have female protagonists, and which foreground sociopolitical concerns. While not always 'activists', the women characters in these films frequently become 'active', reversing or problematizing the usual masculine/feminine, active/passive dichotomies which often characterized earlier representations of women in national allegories. As Pratt hints in her comment on *La historia oficial*, it is as if the emergence into the 'real' public sphere of such a high-profile and powerful *female* activism had made, for some filmmakers at least, a certain kind of

fictional woman character the most appropriate filmic metonym for the representation of the quest of Argentina's citizenry for knowledge and justice.

This argument about the metonymic embodiment of different social and political discourses in the 'heteroglossic' forms of fictional characters is, of course, one way of accounting for the translation of social climates into cinematic signifieds. While it is persuasive to a certain extent it remains, nonetheless, a somewhat reductive analysis. One of the key areas of concern that it sidesteps is the question of film genre. As I have argued elsewhere, *La historia oficial* is not only a family melodrama with a deliberate, national-political resonance (its plot telling the story of a mother who discovers that her adopted daughter had been taken illegally from a couple 'disappeared' by the military authorities); it is also a modern kind of feminist 'woman's film'.¹⁷ Not only does it have a female protagonist and, in part, exhibit concerns with the domestic or 'personal' arena of family and female friends, it stages these elements in a narrative of self-discovery and emancipation (the mother seems, at the end of the film, to leave her husband who had been responsible for the illegal adoption). Nonetheless, as Annette Kuhn writes of what she calls the 'new women's cinema' in the USA and Europe, films like *La historia oficial* do not require feminist readings, 'since it would be problematic for cinematic institutions whose products are directed at a politically heterogeneous audience overtly to take up positions which might alienate sections of that audience'.¹⁸ The fact that, in the Argentine context, 'feminist' discourses were in many cases disavowed by individual female activists and political groups involved in struggle during this period underlines another reason for the importance of polysemy.¹⁹ *La historia oficial* clearly succeeded in appealing both to national and to international audiences with its multilayered political story using a popular genre. Nearly two million spectators saw it in Argentine cinemas alone and it was the first Argentine film to win an Oscar for the Best Foreign Language film of 1986.²⁰

Unlike *La historia oficial* which was released in 1985 into the heady atmosphere of a country recently returned to democracy and still optimistic about the future, Jeanine Meerapfel's film *La amiga* was produced against the depressing economic and political backdrop of the late 1980s in Argentina. On the economic front, these were the years of the savage hyperinflation. In the political sphere, the early efforts of the first democratic government to investigate and punish the crimes committed by the military and their supporters during the years of the dictatorship had been severely undermined, if not actually reversed, by two pieces of legislation in 1986 and 1987, which strictly limited the timescale and scope of further prosecutions.

17 Catherine Grant, 'Gender, genre and the social imaginary in some films from Argentina's "cinema of redemocratization" (1983–1993)', in Eamonn Rodgers (ed.), *Cinema and Ideology* (Glasgow: Strathclyde Modern Language Studies, New Series, 1996), pp. 17–33.

18 Kuhn, *Women's Pictures*, p. 135.

19 See various essays which discuss the Mothers' campaign, in Elizabeth Jelin (ed.), *Women and Social Change in Latin America* (London: Zed Press, 1990).

20 Figures taken from the INC, quoted by Alberto Ciria, *Más allá de la pantalla: cine argentino. historia y política* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1995), pp. 192–3.

There were also further attempted military uprisings as sections of the Argentine army grew restless in the face of what they perceived as continued attacks on their integrity and their right to 'defend' their country as they saw fit. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in these years to defend their democracy and to protest against the 'full stop' legislation, to little avail. In 1990, Carlos Menem, who had succeeded Alfonsín as democratically elected president in 1989, announced a pardon for the leaders of the military juntas which had run the country between 1976 and 1983.

An Argentine–West German coproduction, *La amiga* was one of a number of films with non-Argentine, or non-Argentine resident, directors (hence, with 'foreign appeal') to be partly financed by the Buenos Aires-based, Jorge Estrada Mora production company. Its director, Jeanine Meerapfel, was born and brought up in Argentina but has lived and worked as a filmmaker in Germany since the mid 1960s. Meerapfel had made her reputation with a number of German-language films in the 1980s which were associated with the New German Cinema movement. Estrada Mora specializes in coproductions with versions in English and Spanish, 'aimed directly at the rich US video and television market',²¹ though *La amiga* also had a German version.²²

In *La amiga*, the Norwegian actress Liv Ullmann plays the character of María, a Catholic housewife whose left-wing activist son disappears at the hands of paramilitary forces acting under the orders of the military leaders in the early years of the dictatorship. María is provoked into joining the protests of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo by the failure of the conventional methods which she and her husband, Pancho (played by the Argentine actor, Federico Luppi), use to try to find out what happened to their son.²³ Neither María's husband, who gradually seems to 'give up' his search for his son, nor her best friend from childhood, the other protagonist of the film, Raquel, a middle-class, Jewish actress (played by Argentine Cipe Lincovsky), ever fully comprehend María's decision to join the Mothers' protests. Raquel's oppositional stance to the regime leads to antisemitic threats and actual attacks, and forces her into exile in Germany, leaving behind her successful theatrical production of *Antigone*. Meanwhile, Pancho is compelled to 'face up to the reality that he no longer fills the role of provider and organizer of the family'²⁴, and María deepens her commitment to the Mothers' campaign. When Raquel returns from exile after the end of the dirty war, María is now one of the Mothers' leading spokeswomen, whereas Raquel struggles to find her place in the new Argentina, toying with the idea of producing a play about the Mothers.

One of the most enjoyable formal elements in *La amiga* is its use of two female-friend protagonists – María and Raquel – with their separate but intertwining stories which span two continents and two

²¹ Torrents, 'The cinema that never was', p. 39.

²² *La amiga* was produced by Alma Film (Berlin), Estrada Mora Film (Buenos Aires) and Journal Film (Berlin). The German version is entitled *Die Freundin*.

²³ John King, 'Assailing the heights of macho pictures: women filmmakers in contemporary Argentina', in Susan Bassnett (ed.), *Knives and Angels: Women Writers in Latin America* (London: Zed Press, 1990) pp. 158–70, 167.

²⁴ King, 'Assailing the heights', p. 169.

countries (Argentina and Germany). In this 'female buddy movie' structure, it resembles certain films from North America in the 1970s, made against the backdrop of the increasingly influential women's movement (such as the late Fred Zinnemann's *Julia* [1977]), and in the 1980s (such as *Beaches* [Garry Marshall, 1988]). In *La amiga*, we are not only shown the history of María and Raquel's friendship (as in *Julia* and *Beaches*) but screen time and space seem fairly evenly divided between the two women's stories.²⁵

²⁵ John King argues that María's story is given more emotional weight in the film, partly because she is given the 'last word' *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Meerapfel has stated that she had long wanted to make a film about the story of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from her voluntary exile in Germany. According to Meerapfel, parts of María's story are loosely based on the experiences of one of the founder members of the Mothers' Movement, Hebe de Bonafini, who stayed with the director in Berlin while she was giving talks at political meetings there.²⁶ In the earliest drafts of the script, the film

²⁶ Jeanine Meerapfel's comment at a Colloquium at the Filmoteca Española in Madrid, 11 February 1997.



La amiga – María (Liv Ullmann) shifts from housewife to campaigner after her son 'disappears'. Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.

27 My interview with Jeanine Meerapfel, Madrid, 12 February 1997.

28 My interview with Jeanine Meerapfel.

29 A point Jackie Stacey makes of the films with two female protagonists which she analyses in 'Desperately seeking difference', in Gamman and Marshment (eds), *The Female Gaze* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), pp. 112–29, 115

30 Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 172.

was to have only one protagonist: the character of the Mother. But Meerapfel has said that these versions just did not work: María was turning out to be an ultra-‘saintly’ and uninteresting character. What was needed was an antagonist (*una antípoda*) to provide a productive dichotomy for the film’s structure.²⁷ At this stage Meerapfel began to collaborate with the Polish filmmaker Agnieszka Holland, who got a screenplay development credit. Together they worked on the plot structure, coming up with the idea of a story about two childhood friends – one Catholic, one Jewish – who eventually grow apart because of their different experiences of, and responses to, the events of the dirty war: María (like most of the real Mothers) uncompromising in her pursuit of the truth about her son’s disappearance, and Raquel who only wants to ‘preserve the little bit of democracy that we actually have’. Like the characters in *La historia oficial*, the two protagonists of Meerapfel’s film may ‘stand’, therefore, on one level, for irreconcilably different attitudes towards the fight for justice in post ‘dirty-war’ Argentina, as well as, on a more ‘universal’ level, for fundamentally opposing attitudes towards political struggle in general: pragmatism versus idealism (classic tropes in the Argentine cinema of ‘redemocratization’). In the opinion of the filmmaker, the invention of the character of Raquel led to the possibility of creatively exploring the ‘friction between two different realities’,²⁸ which are clearly personal and political at one and the same time.

Like other ‘new women’s pictures’ about female friendship, *La amiga* is a highly self-reflexive film. It inscribes in its very plot and structure similar kinds of identificatory pleasures and displeasures as those which might be experienced by the film’s actual audiences.²⁹ The film begins with an idealized narrative recounting the origins of the two women’s friendship in pre-pubescent girlhood and depicts the pleasures for the two young girls of what Jackie Stacey has called the ‘intimacy between femininities’.³⁰ Then the film proceeds to ‘spoil’ this ideal friendship by setting narrative obstacles for the two adult women characters in the way of a return to the relationship shown in these first, highly enjoyable images of plenitude and reciprocity. Spectators may well align themselves, consciously and unconsciously, with different protagonists at different points. But, above all with this film, they are likely to desire precisely a return to the pleasurable cinematic friendship established in the title sequence, mirroring the desires of the two characters to do just this at certain points in the narrative.

The women’s friendship is born of María’s girlhood act of solidarity with Raquel in the face of an anti-semitic attack by a group of children, led by Pancho, who later marries María. The film ends with Raquel’s act of solidarity as she goes to see María, despite their fundamental differences, to listen finally to her point of view. By ‘solidarity’ I mean to imply here a political act of *positioning*

31 Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 62.

32 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. xvi.

33 This is a common anti-semitic slur in Argentina, where many Jewish migrants fled from oppression in Eastern Europe in the first half of this century.

34 The film is *Ayúdame a vivir*, directed by José A. (el 'Negro') Ferreyra (Argentina, 1936).

oneself with an other as a result of an act of empathy. As Madan Sarup writes, 'Solidarity implies readiness to fight and joining the battle for the sake of the other's difference, not one's own'.³¹ And, as Richard Rorty argues,

solidarity . . . is to be achieved . . . by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. . . . It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people.³²

The references in these quotes to 'the other's difference', and to 'strange' and 'unfamiliar' people are significant here since *La amiga*'s first sequence shows an act of solidarity precisely with a character who is perceived to be an outsider, at least from the point of view of the supposed ethnic group to which María and her schoolfriends belong. The group of friends have gone to a cemetery to bury a canary. As the uninvited Raquel joins them they call her 'Rusa de mierda' ('Russian Yid'),³³ despite the fact that, as later becomes evident in the film, her ancestors were German Jews. She is not allowed at the 'funeral' because 'our canary is Catholic'. María defends her new friend with her knowledge that Jews can attend Catholic funerals (her grandmother's funeral had been attended by their Jewish family doctor). In the ensuing fight, the poor canary gets trampled under foot.

This opening sequence is followed by a scene in Raquel's family home which depicts María's enjoyable identification with Raquel's 'foreignness' or Jewishness. This scene displays María's visceral pleasure in the putting on of the other's 'unfamiliar' clothes (which Raquel says 'smell of Europe') as the girls play at dressing up, while she sips away at her *mate* gourd, a common cinematic signifier of *Argentinidad* ('being Argentinian'). The sequence also involves an uncanny imitation by María of her friend singing a Yiddish family song (María notes that Raquel's parents 'speak funny'). This scene depicts an act of mirroring as well, as the two girls play a clapping game while they sing.

María's identification with Raquel is followed by Raquel's identification with María (and with being Argentinian), in a beautiful sequence filmed on a pier where the two girls have gone to watch a film on an open-air screen. Raquel tastes María's *dulce de leche* (caramel spread) cake, another ubiquitous signifier of *Argentinidad*. As the two girls gaze at the melodrama being projected, Raquel also mirrors María's expressed desire to be an actress, sharing her new friend's identification with the great Argentine actress, Libertad Lamarque, who is at that moment delivering on the screen the kind of impassioned musical monologue for which she became renowned at the height of her stardom in the women's pictures of the 1930s and 1940s.³⁴ The two girls swear a blood pact of allegiance and their friendship appears to be eternally sealed.

35 The film alludes here, and elsewhere, to the discovery, in the aftermath of the 'dirty war', of mass graves (known popularly as the 'No Names' or 'NN' graves). The graves were 'presented' to the relatives of the 'disappeared' by the democratic government agencies as 'proof' that their children were dead. While some relatives accepted them, the more hard-line group of Mothers (like the fictional María) refused to acknowledge them since this would legitimize attempts to put a 'full stop' to the fight for justice. John King links these allusions in *La amiga* to its theme of *Antigone*, while Raquel plays *Antigone*, María is an 'Antigone in reverse'. King, 'Assailing the heights', p. 168.

In many respects, however, after the opening moments of the film, the narrative is not really one about the pleasures of identification in friendship. Instead, most of *La amiga* is taken up with the story of the estrangement of the two women. Aside from the two women's political differences, the problems in the friendship seem to arise partly because at a certain point in the film it is clear that María has *stopped* empathizing with Raquel, no longer able to identify with her situation as a Jewish woman under attack. In a scene in Raquel's downtown apartment where the actress is making plans to go into exile in Germany after the bomb attack on her production of *Antigone*, María accuses her friend of cowardice in not wanting to stay and fight. Later, when the two meet up again as María goes to Berlin to speak to the West German President on behalf of the Mothers' Movement, María cannot accept her friend's gesture in taking her to visit the cemetery where some of Raquel's Jewish ancestors are buried. She interprets it, correctly it seems, as Raquel's attempt to convince her that, historically, others who have experienced the pain of oppression and loss have taken solace in knowing where their loved ones are buried. Yet Raquel's desire for closure is incompatible with María's desire for knowledge and justice in her search for her son and so she quite violently rejects her friend's attempt to bridge the gap between them.³⁵

The long-awaited moment of the two women's final reconciliation is deferred, suitably enough, until the end of the film. This 'epilogue', set in 1986 against the background of the Mothers' demonstrations against the 'Full Stop' Law, takes up almost directly from the moment, some three years before, of the definitive rupture in the two women's friendship when Raquel tells María in a Buenos Aires cemetery that if she carries on refusing to compromise over her son's death, 'You're going to end up on your own and I won't be there for you'. Their long-desired reconciliation is made possible by a kind of 'joke catharsis' when, as the two women begin to argue once more about their different politics, Raquel finally lets María into a big secret: she hates her friend's *dulce de leche* cake, an unexpected comment which shatters the uncomfortable atmosphere between the two estranged friends, but which, notably, leaves their differences intact. Nonetheless, they may walk together to sit once more before the now blank cinema screen at the same pier location as at the beginning of the film. As María finally explains to Raquel why she holds the beliefs she does, the two friends are framed together in a final image of solidarity, as the credits roll and the camera pans away to the horizon.

I would like to analyse one sequence in detail to show how the film potentially allows the spectator similar possibilities for identification to those of the women characters. Shortly after the German cemetery scene, there is a head and shoulders shot of María standing in a Berlin street, looking at a shop window, as an upset

³⁶ Here I am paraphrasing Laura Marks, 'Deterritorialized filmmaking: a Deleuzian politics of hybrid cinema', *Screen*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994), pp. 244–64, 254.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

³⁸ *Un muro de silencio* was co-produced by Aleph Producciones (Buenos Aires) and the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (Mexico City) in association with the British television company Channel Four. It was broadcast on British network television by Channel Four on 23 September 1994 under the title *Black Flowers*. Lita Stantic was the producer of all but the last of María Luisa Bemberg's films.

Raquel moves behind her out of shot. The film cuts to a reverse medium shot showing María's point of view: cages of canaries in the window. Then it cuts back quickly to the same shot as before, showing María's reaction to what she has seen, a look of anguish. For María this is an uncanny experience, in the Freudian sense, but it is also a moment of what Bergson called 'attentive recognition'.³⁶ She oscillates between seeing the object (the canaries), recalling the virtual image it calls to mind (the earlier canary in the Buenos Aires cemetery), and comparing the virtual object with the one before her. She is shown to be remembering in this way her initial act of solidarity with Raquel, a memory which she must have repressed to have reacted differently in the face of Raquel's Jewishness on subsequent occasions. This sequence, however, can only be 'read' in the above way if the caged canaries shown in the reverse shot prompt the spectator to recall the canary shown at the beginning of the film and to create, like María, a semantic connection between the two images. Attentive recognition is, then, in this case, potentially a *participatory* notion of spectatorship.³⁷ It requires of the spectator an act of memory, an act of imagination and an act of identification or empathy with a fictional character to 'work'. If the spectator takes up the semantic challenge set by the film's many such non-linear, visual cues, they can make the intended associative links: in this case, with one of the symbols in the film of Jewishness, but also with that of the lack of respect for the dead which connects both of the women, in different ways, to the theme of *Antigone*. It is an invitation to an act of solidarity, one of many such invitations that this complex film makes.

In Lita Stantic's first feature film as writer and director, *Un muro de silencio*, Kate Benson, a left-wing British filmmaker (played by the British actress Vanessa Redgrave), who cannot get funding for a film project about Ireland, is in Buenos Aires to make a film about an Argentine couple who were disappeared during the 'dirty war'.³⁸ She works closely with the scriptwriter for the project, Bruno Tealdi (played by the Argentine actor and filmmaker Lautaro Murúa), in exile during the 'dirty war', who knew the couple on whom his story is closely based: a writer Silvia Cassini (played by the Mexican actress Ofelia Medina) who was released from detention along with her daughter María Elisa, and her first husband, a left-wing militant, Jaime Brie, who Bruno presumes is dead. Kate Benson knows that the story is based on the letters and the account of a 'real' victim of the 'dirty war', but she does not know Silvia's identity, and they never meet. In Bruno's script for Kate's film the two protagonists are called 'Ana' whose role is interpreted by Laura (played by Soledad Villamil), and 'Julio', who is played by Patricio (Julio Chávez).

There are two main narrative levels in *Un muro de silencio*. The

first one, set in 1990, is focalized through the two main female characters. There is Kate's story as she makes her film. She rehearses with the actors and discusses their roles with them. She struggles to understand what happened in Argentina and why people are not more angry about the government pardon of the military generals. She discusses this with both Bruno and an English-speaking journalist (played by the French-Canadian actor and filmmaker André Melançon). She visits an illegal detention centre and attends the Mothers' weekly demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo. She watches archive footage from Peronist films about the period before the 'dirty war' and from newsreels of the huge mid-1980s protests in Buenos Aires for justice on the human rights abuses. She also longs throughout to meet and to understand the real 'Ana'. As she is completing her film, she gets a letter telling her that her film about Ireland will be financed after all. Then there is Silvia's story. Now happily remarried to a musician, Ernesto (played by the Argentine actor Lorenzo Quinteros), she is forced into thinking about her past when she hears that Bruno's film script seems to be based on her story. As her repressed feelings and thoughts about Jaime return, she sees someone who looks uncannily like him in the street and she takes to tracking him down. In the meantime, she seeks out Bruno and accuses him of stealing her confidences. Later there is an emotional moment of reconciliation between the two of them. As Ernesto, Silvia's present husband, begins to worry about her state of mind, he finds out about the film. He goes to see Kate Benson, wrongly accusing her of upsetting his wife who 'was happy' before she knew about the film project, a comment which amazes Kate. Finally, after a car crash caused by her intense desire to follow the man she mistakenly thinks might be Jaime, Silvia confronts her past by taking her daughter (who up until this point had hidden her interest in her father Jaime in order to protect her mother) to see one of the detention centres and to answer her questions. A framing device, the detention centre is the same one that Bruno had taken Kate to see at the beginning of the film.

The second main narrative level in the film concerns the 'enactment' of Bruno's script in Kate's film. There are ten of these semi-realist film sequences, set in 1976, in which, with the eye of Kate's camera removed, the actors Laura and Patricio play 'Ana' and 'Julio'.³⁹ The sequences present their 'disappearance', 'Ana' and her daughter's release, and 'Julio's arrangement of a final meeting with 'Ana'. Two of the sequences (the first and the last) are employed in a Brechtian gesture of distancing; they end with Kate shouting '¡Corte!' ('Cut!') and the actors coming out of character to leave what are revealed to be film sets. But the other eight function as flashbacks unmediated by the story of Kate's film, and several of these are clearly focalized as Silvia's memories.⁴⁰ A 'fictional' story written by an exile and made into a film by a foreigner becomes,

39 'Semi-realist' because, unlike the rest of this film, which on the whole uses non-studio based, interior and exterior locations, these sequences, with two exceptions, are shot in such a way as to foreground their studio-set locations. While the actors' performance style is realist, camera angles and set boundaries are used to slight defamiliarizing effect.

40 There is only one 'real' flashback in the film when, during the opening, slow motion credit sequence, we see Silvia riding a bicycle with Jaime and baby María Elisa, in an idealized representation of the days before their disappearance.

therefore, the 'real' Silvia's representation of the past. Even the still photographs from the film set, given to Silvia by Bruno along with a copy of the filmscript, for a while come to stand for those 'real' ones edited out of the family photo arrangement on Silvia's mantelpiece, not only for Silvia but also for her daughter and Ernesto who are both shown gazing at them.

While both films use characters as metonyms for changing social discourses in Argentina about the 'dirty war', unlike *La amiga*, which is framed in a popular genre in the same way as some of the other films in Argentina's cinema of 'redemocratization', *Un muro de silencio* harks back to an earlier tradition in Latin American political filmmaking with its defamiliarizing techniques and, on the whole, its non-melodramatic framing.⁴¹ An 'anti-buddy movie' on the surface, the two female protagonists of Stantic's film never meet.⁴² One of the women, Silvia, is not at all interested in the other; the overwhelming desire which propels her narrative, first to repress a painful past and then to embrace it with all the difficulties entailed by that process, are entirely unmediated by the 'person' of Kate Benson, even if her film provides the catalyst for the Argentine character's change of heart.

Kate Benson, on the other hand, 'desperately seeks' Silvia. Her character's narrative is propelled by a longing to understand 'what really happened in Argentina'. This desire produces a story of 1960s and early 1970s revolutionary idealism crushed by the dictatorship, then resurfacing as a hunger for justice in the mid 1980s, before being dissipated once more by further military pressure and the demands of neoliberalist pragmatism to 'forget the past'. Yet the enigma at the heart of her solidarity film project, the one she fails to solve, is that posed by 'Ana'. She cannot understand 'Ana' because she cannot 'know' Silvia. In one of several conversations she has with Bruno about the real 'Ana', Kate asks him how much of his script is imagined. He confesses that, since he based it on her letters and her account, not much. Kate replies: 'I don't have that privilege. "Ana" would have cleared up a large number of my doubts. . . . Do you know what difference that would have made? When the actors look to me, you are sitting at home, perhaps remembering the old days. And I am condemned to carry on filming in the dark, giving them answers with no certainty whatsoever.' Bruno informs her that even if she had met the real 'Ana' she would still have needed her imagination, since the fictional 'Ana' is 'just as real as the one you want to know'.

Kate's desire for the 'authenticity' and the security of the native informant's knowledge is left unfulfilled. She will presumably return 'home' to her film project about Ireland, disillusioned by the possibilities for her Argentine film.⁴³ 'If even the victims want to forget, what's the point of my film', she asks. Unlike in *La amiga* where both the film's formal structures and its discourse turn on the

41 In a 1994 interview, Stantic said that she had wanted to make a film about this topic because people close to her had been 'disappeared'. The distancing effects in her film, in part, bespeak her own reticence in attempting to represent what are still very difficult issues: 'I wanted the film to be reflexive [rather than emotional] . . . I didn't want there to be a catharsis within the film'. Fernando Martín Peña, 'Charla con Lita Stantic: Contar desde adentro', *Film*, no. 8 (June/July 1994), pp.30–31, 30. In the same interview she points out that she hadn't wanted to direct the film herself. She had passed the script on to Margarethe von Trotta who had turned the project down because she thought the issues too complex to be dealt with by a non-Argentinian, p. 30.

42 They nearly meet when both go to Bruno's house on the same afternoon. Also, Kate accidentally discovers a photo of the young Silvia among Bruno's papers near the end of the film, but by then, she has realized that real 'contact' between the two of them is both impossible and pointless.

43 This device of the foreigner returning home, not having achieved what they wanted and sure in the knowledge that they 'cannot really understand', is also used by Ken Loach in *Carla's Song*.

tropes of empathy and imagination, in *Un muro de silencio* the emphasis is on the difficulties of identification, the limits of imagination and the impossibility of knowing. In Stantic's film, even the elusive native informant cannot 'know' her own memories of the past beyond the mediation of the discourses of the present.

In *Un muro de silencio* there is a moment when the character of Kate Benson is leaving a downtown Buenos Aires cinema where she has been researching archive footage as background for her film. In the foyer, she walks past two film posters, one advertising Eisenstein's *October* and the other Peter Greenaway's film *The Belly of an Architect*. The posters reveal the cinema to be an arthouse, but at the same time they point in the direction of this film and also *La amiga*'s most probable, international cinema exhibition context. While both films contain self-reflexive sequences of film viewing, *Un muro de silencio* is more obviously self-reflexive about foreign collaboration in 'national' cinema production than *La amiga*. In this closing section I would like to examine more closely some of the poetics of (re) and (dis)location at stake in both of these processes.⁴⁴

Like many other international coproductions where the presence of foreign stars is often one of the preconditions for financial support, these two films both use non-Argentine actors in leading roles: in *La amiga*, Liv Ullmann, and in *Un muro de silencio*, Vanessa Redgrave, Ofelia Medina and André Melançon. It might be expected that these actors would be playing foreign characters and would therefore be acting in part as mediators of Argentine experiences for foreign audiences. Yet, in both of these films the casting decisions are more complex than this. In *La amiga*, Liv Ullmann plays a character from Buenos Aires. For the Spanish-language version her voice was dubbed by the Argentine actress Bárbara Mugica in a process of cultural translation which has been described by Jeanine Meerapfel as 'Argentinización'. In *Un muro de silencio*, only Vanessa Redgrave plays a character clearly marked as foreign. André Melançon appears to be playing a foreign journalist who has been resident in Buenos Aires for some time and is thus authorised as one of Redgrave's 'native' interlocutors in her quest for understanding of the Argentine situation.

The role of the foreign mediator does not disappear from *La amiga*, however, but is instead displaced onto the Argentine character of Raquel, played by the locally well-known, Buenos-Aires actress Cipe Lincovsky. Raquel's character is constructed through an overdetermined outsiderhood, a difference figured in the film principally by her Jewishness and her German ancestry, but also by her social class, her unmarried and childless state, her forced exile and her subsequent alienation when she returns to Argentina.⁴⁵

Raquel's 'difference' has another function in the film, though,

⁴⁴ I have taken the neologism '(re)(dis)location' from the work of Magdalene Ang-Lygate who is reworking Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of '(un)location'. See Magdalene Ang-Lygate, 'Everywhere to go but home: on (re)(dis)(un)location', *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1996), pp. 375–88.

⁴⁵ Cipe Lincovsky went into exile in Spain during the Dictatorship. Both films cast Argentine actors who are associated with left-wing or anti-Dictatorship politics, and who might therefore 'signify' this for local audiences, while for international audiences the casting of Redgrave and Ullmann, both very well-known for their political activities, might 'work' in the same way.

46 Here I paraphrase Stacey, 'Desperately seeking difference', p. 128.

47 By 'foregrounding' I mean that it will seem 'natural' to audiences that some of the time Raquel will speak German in Berlin, just as it will seem 'natural' that some of the time Vanessa Redgrave's character will speak English with the other character who 'happens' to speak English in *Un muro* (Melançon's journalist).

48 Hjört, 'Danish cinema and the politics of recognition', p. 522.

other than as a potential pole of 'outsider identification'. In the female buddy-movie genre, the difference which produces narrative desire clearly cannot be sexual difference (as in the genre of heterosexual romance). Instead, this desire is produced by the difference between the female protagonists.⁴⁶ If one of the women had been figured as foreign, this difference between them would arguably have been excessive (like that dividing the two protagonists of *Un muro de silencio*) and impossible for the narrative of estranged then reconciled friendship to contain. The Liv Ullmann character must appear even more Argentinian than the *dulce de leche* her character adores, while the Argentine identity of her co-protagonist must become overdeterminedly 'hyphenated' (Argentine-Jewish-German) to become the necessary signifier of difference.

Processes of cultural translation involve conscious (as well as unconscious) forms of identification. In terms of film production, these are similar to the processes of 'making familiar' which are an integral part of constructing all realist texts. But international coproductions like *La amiga* and *Un muro de silencio*, which employ several languages, one of which will almost always be 'foreign' to their audiences, at once foreground and obscure these processes in order to pass off their discourses as natural.⁴⁷ With such linguistic complexities at stake there may be a failure to repress all the traces which might bespeak the hybridity of the films' production origins and of their mode of address. As Mette Hjört writes in an essay on Danish national cinema in the age of globalization: 'In certain contexts all traces of national specificity – accents, foreign tongues, and even subtitles – appear only as so many uncanny and displeasing departures from what is dominant and seemingly natural'.⁴⁸ There are several such departures in both films when the processes of cultural translation seem to break down under their own weight. Near the end of *La amiga* in both its Spanish-language version and its version with English subtitles, an intertitle in German appears 'Zwei Jahre später, 1986' ('Two Years Later, 1986'). Up until this point, all of the other intertitles which signal time frame and location have contained only place names and dates, and so have needed no real translation. This 'primary' German title, which appears without subtitle translation, is 'left' in the other, subsequently 'secondary' versions by mistake. In *La amiga*, it is not just Raquel's parents who 'speak funny', in María's reference to Yiddish (a 'transnational' or diasporic language). Most Spanish-language spectators are likely to notice that Liv Ullmann is playing her part in a language (English) different from the one heard and is being dubbed by an Argentine actress, while the other characters speak 'in their own voices' which are, on the whole, recorded diegetically (the opposite would, of course, be true of the versions of the film in English and German). In some feminist avant-garde cinema, audio visual counterpoint has often been used in order to disrupt the illusion that voices are

49 Trinh T. Minh-ha, "'Who is speaking?' of nation, community and first-person interviews", in Pietropaolo and Testaferrri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 57.

'screwed' to mouths in realist cinema practice, as filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha has put it.⁴⁹ While the intention is not the same in *La amiga*, the result is, nonetheless, potentially a defamiliarizing experience. While voices are, on the whole, 'screwed to mouths' in *Un muro de silencio*, even in this film (with all versions containing subtitles, though in different places for different national publics) uncanny linguistic experiences may be had by some of the film's audiences. Redgrave speaks in both English and Spanish, but to many native speakers of Spanish her rendering of that language would probably be, at the level of grammar, syntax and idiomatic lexical choice, too perfect, too rehearsed, to be believable (while her accent does not succeed in passing her off as bilingual). Meanwhile, the Mexican actress playing Silvia Cassini has to adopt an Argentinian accent, and Melançon's journalist has a heavy French-Canadian accent whether he is speaking in Spanish or English.

Cultural translation is not just a linguistic matter, however. Another process at work concerns location, as Jeanine Meerapfel has openly acknowledged in the case of her film. Like other realist film narratives which deal with the events or the aftermath of the 'dirty war' and with related issues of oblivion and active memory, both *La amiga* and *Un muro de silencio* mix incidental location shooting with recognizably 'authentic' locations (and often politically significant ones) such as the Plaza de Mayo, the Plaza del Congreso, the Avenida de Julio, Ezeiza airport and Lavalle street where many Buenos Aires cinemas are located. They also use 'local' musical signifiers of *Argentinidad* (tango, associated principally with Raquel's story in *La amiga*, and with the flashbacks in *Un muro de silencio*) and of *Latin Americanness* (the Andean pan pipes associated, in *La amiga*, with María's growing political consciousness) as audio cues of cultural locatedness, ones which, at the same time, have international mass appeal.

Some actual geographical locations are, of course, more 'incidental' than others for certain audiences. At one point in *La amiga*, we learn where María's family live, and therefore the place where María, Raquel and Pancho all grew up: the Buenos Aires suburb of Quilmes, to the south of the capital. To the non-Argentine spectator this is a throwaway detail, indeed, as it probably would be to most Argentine spectators. Nonetheless, many others would recognize the pier and beach locations which frame the film. The little girls are shown at the open air cinema which really used to exist at the Club Pejerrey in Quilmes, which was and still is a popular destination for Buenos Aires family outings. With or without spectatorial recognition (usually enjoyable in itself), visually the location is highly pleasurable.

Meerapfel went to Quilmes for the first time ever in 1986 as part of a documentary she made about filmmaking in Buenos Aires after the 'dirty war'.⁵⁰ She was taken there by a sound technician from the

50 *Desembarcos* (Jeanine Meerapfel, Argentina, 1989) a coproduction between the Buenos Aires Goethe Institut and the Argentine Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía, broadcast on British television by Channel Four (17 February 1992) in the *Global Images* series under the title, *When Memory Speaks*.

suburb who was working on the documentary, Alcides Chiesa, who turned out to have been 'disappeared' and tortured between 1976 and 1980 in the interrogation centre known as the 'Pozo de Quilmes' (the 'Black Hole of Quilmes'). In a scene which is mirrored by the sequence at the end of *La amiga* where Raquel and María are filmed on the pier in medium shot and closeup discussing their relative politics, Meerapfel and Chiesa are filmed, in medium shot and closeup, sitting on the waterfront at Quilmes, with intercut shots of the pier in the background, discussing Chiesa's experiences as a prisoner and his desire to make his own film about them. Throughout the documentary, Chiesa is asked about the 'authenticity' of the films that are being made about the 'dirty war'. He is 'authorized' as an informant who has directly experienced what others, including Meerapfel, are trying to represent. He repeated this role with *La amiga* where he co-wrote the final version of the script with Meerapfel, this time as part of the wider processes of cultural translation involved in its making.⁵¹

51 In some 'non-commercial' showings in Argentina, *La amiga* and *Desembarcos* were shown together, making the intertextual connections between the two films' use of the location explicit for local audiences.

The metaphor of a buddy movie may well be a useful one in describing the crosscultural/transnational filmmaking experience. 'Difference' must exist for the film to be 'apto para todos los públicos' (suitable for all audiences both 'at home' and 'abroad'), and so cultural difference is frequently inscribed in the very plots and structures of these films. The desire for community or solidarity across cultural and political boundaries is frequently what propels the narratives forward. It is also what provides some of them with utopian endings, although this will, of course, also depend on other factors. While *La amiga* does not efface the difficulties for the future in the friendship between the protagonists, it is still a product of more optimistic discourses about oblivion and active memory in the Argentina of the mid to late 1980s than were available or 'intelligible' in the 1990s for Stantic's film.⁵² But for the realist illusions of 'familiarity' to be maintained, cultural difference must not be excessive: the production and distribution contexts must be contained, or disavowed by the narrative. Where excess does erupt in the text, in the uncanny moments when the repressed of the film's contexts returns, there are moments of potential displeasure and of a potential lack of recognition.

52 Ximena Triquell makes this telling point in her article on the films from these periods: 'Cine y discurso social en la Argentina post-dictadura' (forthcoming).

The politics of location in globalized media, however, are not those of a 'dangerous' hybridity, a term which bespeaks a nostalgia for imaginary, 'pure' forms of national cinema, as well as for imaginary, 'discrete' discourses of national politics. Nor are they those of 'unlocation', except where that term refers to those for whom, as Mette Hjört writes, 'cultural salience becomes a form of intense monologia, capable of exiling diverse forms of culture from the public sphere'.⁵³ Cultural products such as *La amiga* and *Un muro de silencio* have been made, distributed and seen despite, or rather *because of*, these 'regimes of truth'. Yet, while *La amiga*,

53 Hjört, 'Danish cinema and the politics of recognition', p. 521.

⁵⁴ Quoted by Fernando Martín Peña in 'Lita Stantic: contar desde adentro', *Film*, (Buenos Aires) no. 8 (1994), pp. 30–31, 31.

⁵⁵ Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 8.

⁵⁶ Doris Sommer, 'Resistant texts and incompetent readers', *Poetics Today*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1994), p. 543.

clearly situated within a popular genre, was critically and popularly successful, more than recovering its costs through international television and video sales, *Un muro de silencio*, with its more 'difficult' narrative form, encountered a fate, both in Argentina and elsewhere, uncannily similar to the story it portrays, that of a public seemingly tired of hearing about the 'dirty war'. When the film was shown at the San Sebastián film festival in Spain, Stantic overheard the comment 'Otra de desaparecidos' ('Yet another film about the disappeared').⁵⁴

These problems of 'topicality' are potentially fatal for Latin American political filmmaking in what is a very limited commercial market to begin with. The potential for co-production arrangements has been drying up since the early 1990s as foreign television and film production companies look 'east' to 'new' stories and, of course, new markets there. The foreign money, like the foreign filmmaker portrayed in Stantic's film, has largely packed up and gone to someone else's 'home'. The Argentine cinema industry which is left behind continues to dedicate itself more and more to the very necessary task of reconstructing its own national audience base, devastated by years of economic decline and neoliberal structural change. In the process, it is turning further and further away from making overtly political cinema.

It is not too difficult, therefore, to imagine a future where the only 'solidarity films' made about Latin America would be ones which, to all intents and purposes, have few connections with the national cinemas or the audiences of that continent. At least *La amiga* and *Un muro de silencio* were made partly for Argentine audiences, and thus had to incorporate an 'Argentine perspective'. All cross-cultural identifications have, to a certain extent, an 'imperializing character', on psychic, social and economic levels.⁵⁵ But the fact that, in the future, foreign 'solidarity films', like those US and European ones of the 1980s, might have no need to identify with, or address themselves directly to, the real people who live in their film locations, might well prove to be what Doris Sommer refers to, in a discussion of self/other identifications, as 'the ultimate violence . . . appropriation in the guise of an embrace'.⁵⁶

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The humiliation of the father: melodrama and Cinema Novo's critique of conservative modernization

ISMAIL XAVIER

During the late 1960s a significant shift in focus occurred in Brazilian cinema towards the representation of private life and family dramas. This took place after a decade in which this cinema had primarily concerned itself with the public sphere, and with issues of labour exploitation, social movements, political history and allegories of national identity. Some Cinema Novo and post-Cinema Novo films provide compelling evidence of this change of emphasis. For example, *Copacabana me Engana/Copacabana Deceives Me* (Antônio Carlos Fontoura, 1969) and *Brasil Ano 2000/Brazil Year 2000* (Walter Lima Junior, 1969) focus on moral conflicts deriving from the generation gaps dividing petit-bourgeois characters; *Matou a Família e Foi ao Cinema/Killed the Family and Went to the Movies* (Júlio Bressane, 1969) displays a series of criminal acts committed by passionate people who, despite belonging to different social classes, present similar patterns of frustration and resentment, developed within the private space of the family. The degeneration of the traditional household is depicted in films that thematize the close connection between social changes and family decadence, as in *Os Herdeiros/The Inheritors* (Carlos Diegues, 1969), *A Casa Assassinada/The Murdered House* (Paulo César Saraceni, 1971), *Os Deuses e os Mortos/The Gods and the Dead* (Ruy Guerra, 1970) and

Os Monstros do Babalaô/The Babalao Monsters (Eliseu Visconti, 1970). Significantly, psychoanalysis comes into the foreground as an overt guiding principle in the composition of many of these dramas, to such an extent that a film like *Culpa/Guilt* (Domingos de Oliveira, 1971) begins with a quotation from Freud that performs the same explanatory function which, in early 1960s Cinema Novo films, was fulfilled by social commentary and historical information.

From the late 1960s onwards the experiences of the new generations, influenced by phenomena such as sexual liberation and other new codes of behaviour fostered by the development of mass media culture, provided an impulse for films in which the concern with private life and sexual morality became a valid means of tackling political debates which, at that time, were made difficult by the military regime. The military, who assumed their task to be a contribution to western civilization in the context of the Cold War, were strongly anti-Communist and wanted to accelerate the country's economic growth. On an ideological level, they undertook a strong, symbolic defence of those archaic moral codes, including the traditional family structure, which were in fact threatened by capitalist development and by the consolidation of a consumer society in Brazil. Aware of this contradiction, artists searched for new cinematic forms to express an ironic stance towards the Brazilian conservative modernization. To this end, some Cinema Novo filmmakers moved towards capturing this patriarchal ethos in its most modest and petit-bourgeois form, observing its own household at its moment of decline.

In composing their domestic tragedies, some filmmakers entered into a dialogue with playwrights, a process which involved two different trends in modern Brazilian drama. A first group of filmmakers reworked the tradition of the politicized group Arena Theatre which had developed a realist aesthetic from the late 1950s on. Two good examples of this trend are *Em Familiar/Inside the Family* (Paulo Porto, 1971), with a screenplay by Oduvaldo Vianna Filho and Ferreira Gullar, and *Eles Não Usam Black-Tie/They Don't Wear Black-Ties* (Leon Hirszman, 1980), based on a play written in 1958 by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri. Both films emphasize the relationship between private dramas and class conditions, family affairs and economic crisis. Other filmmakers stress the realm of passion and desire, developing an interesting dialogue with a melodramatic tradition which is best represented, in modern Brazilian literature, by the plays and novels of Nelson Rodrigues, a playwright whose work offers a rich stock of characters and dramatic situations for a cinema engaged in a harsh critique of family life.

Film director Arnaldo Jabor played a key role in this dialogue between cinema and literature.¹ He made two films based on Rodrigues's texts, *Toda Nudez Será Castigada/All Nudity Shall Be Punished* (1972) and *O Casamento/The Wedding* (1975). In both

1 From the late 1960s on, Arnaldo Jabor has been one of the leading figures of Cinema Novo. His first feature film, *Opinião Pública/Public Opinion* (1967), is one of the best examples of cinema verité in the Brazilian documentary tradition. Anticipating some of the issues raised by Jabor's fiction films made in the 1970s, *Opinião Pública* presents a bitter diagnosis of Rio de Janeiro middle-class conservatism just after the 1964 military coup.

films he creates an ironic style of representation in order to posit bad taste, hysteria and family problems as historical symptoms of the decline of patriarchy in Brazil. Jabor's aim is to explore the intimate link between conservative thought and the melodramatic imagination at this specific juncture. Melodrama is incorporated in his work to expose the contradictions of Brazilian modernization during the most severe period of the authoritarian regime (1969–74). I shall examine Jabor's two films in chronological order to highlight the gradual process of dramatic amplification within his strategy: *Toda Nudez* deals with the family drama as an almost closed system; *O Casamento*, with its more complex cast of characters, is centred once more on family dramas, but connects the way the middle-class males handle their private traumas to specific historical moments in Brazilian political life.

In the very opening shot of *Toda Nudez Será Castigada*, Jabor signals the change in the strategies of Cinema Novo in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it became clear that the military dictatorship, which had come to power in 1964 and was consolidated by stronger repressive measures in December 1968, was to last longer than had first seemed likely. In this shot, we follow the film's protagonist, Herculano, driving in his car along Flamengo beach avenue in Rio de Janeiro, with the sky and street-front buildings in the background. This image recalls a nightmarish shot from Glauber Rocha's seminal work *Terra em Transe/Land in Anguish* (1967), a major allegory of the 1964 *coup d'état*. In Rocha's film, the tracking shot along Flamengo beach avenue, surrounded by Burle Marx gardens, becomes a kind of emblem for the rise of the conservative forces. There the protagonist, Porfirio Diaz, is seen from the same viewpoint and crosses the same space as in Jabor's opening sequence, in what is suggested as a triumphal parade.² Diaz presents himself as a fixed mask, exhibiting his proud chin in profile, holding a dark banner in one hand and a crucifix in the other. The whole composition connotes the idea of an angel of darkness who is arriving to begin a new era in Eldorado.³ Herculano's ride in *Toda Nudez* is a more prosaic, everyday event, pointing to the protagonist's self-assurance and enjoyment. The soundtrack sets a radically opposed tone to that of Diaz's parade. The ceremonial sounds of the Afro-Brazilian religion *candomblé* in the earlier film's sequence, with their associations with collective myth, are replaced in the later film by a concert piece by the modern tango composer, Astor Piazzola, that will accompany Herculano's entire story. Passionate, modern and 'cool', from the start the music anticipates the kind of sensibility privileged by Jabor's narration. It helps set up the contrast between this mode of representation and that of *Terra em Transe*, while, at the same time, the visual structure of the shot

2 In *Terra em Transe*, Porfirio Diaz embodies the ascetic, conservative, Christian tradition. Positing himself as a father figure for an entire country, he dedicates his life to the preservation of tradition and purity, deploying a rhetoric permeated by racial prejudice in the overt defence of the privileges of the most aristocratic sector of the ruling class. As Robert Stam summarizes: 'Porfirio Diaz, named after the Mexican dictator, embodies the Latin American version of Iberic despotism'. 'Land in anguish', in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam (eds), *Brazilian Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 149–61, p. 161, n. 1. On *Terra em Transe*, see also Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 57–93.

3 The name of the imaginary state in which the film's action is set.

4 I take this notion of a 'hybrid sphere' from the work of Jacques Donzelot, *La police des familles* (translated into Portuguese by Edições Graal, 1980).

indicates a continuity of concerns, linking Jabor's view of Herculano with Rocha's earlier view of Diaz. With this opening acknowledgement of the earlier, classic Cinema Novo film and the self-conscious way in which it is consistently followed through in the rest of film, Jabor is able to translate his basic assumption: that family affairs constitute a hybrid domain, a point of conjunction in which public and private spheres meet, and in which the confrontation between sexual drives and moral codes acquires a clear political content.⁴

Unlike Diaz, Jabor's protagonist Herculano is not parading towards a government palace to give an inaugural speech. He is going to his secluded mansion, the private domain in which he has seemingly confined Geni, his wife, achieving in this way a happy bourgeois marriage. He is in good humour when he arrives home, looking for Geni with flowers to give her, but he receives no answer when he calls out her name. Instead, his attention is distracted by the noise of a tape recorder. The tape discloses his wife's last message, recorded just before she committed suicide. This message takes us back in time, and Geni's narrative, which is addressed to her husband, dominates the entire film up to the last sequence when the scene switches back to the moment of Herculano's arrival at the mansion. Geni's revelations function as a final gesture of desperate revenge, performed to denounce out loud how Herculano's whole life had always been based on illusions: illusions about herself, about the character of his young son, about the very meaning of their marriage.

The flashback follows the pattern of a three-act play full of intense conflicts and spectacular twists and turns in the opposition the film sets up between Herculano's desire and a varied set of moral constraints. As a spectacle, the film takes advantage of Nelson Rodrigues's dramatic machinery which, by effectively mixing different traditions (from Strindberg and O'Neill to popular melodrama), has had a powerful effect on Brazilian audiences since the 1940s. When the earlier reception of Rodrigues's plays is considered, it becomes clear that what Jabor did was to inaugurate a radically new reading. He enacts the play as a farce in which the victimization of the main characters acquires a tragicomic effect due to the gap between the way they see their dramas and the way the narrative presents them.

In its first stages, Herculano's and Geni's love story obeys a series of stratagems devised by Herculano's brother, Patrício, who lives at Herculano's expense. First Patrício uses Geni, introduced as a prostitute friend, to save his brother from a state of mourning and melancholy caused by the death of his first wife. Taken to the brothel drunk, Herculano undergoes an auspicious rebirth of his sexual life that brings mutual passion. To soothe his troubled conscience about sleeping with a prostitute, however, Herculano

masks this desire under the appearance of charity (he wants to redeem Geni). Meanwhile, for her part, Geni lives out her own rescue fantasies by falling in love with the distressed widower. After this first stage, Patrício instructs Geni in how to overcome his brother's remaining moral resistance by proposing marriage as a precondition for continuing their sex life. This, though, merely displaces the moral conflict from the widower's own conscience onto his open, and comic, struggle with the rest of his family who are not disposed to accept Geni. Central to this struggle is Herculano's son's uncompromizing demand for his father to continue to be faithful to his late mother. Serginho, the son, enters the drama, then, as the agent of castration, switching roles with his father as he becomes the authority figure in the family whose permission Herculano must solicit in order to marry Geni.

A central opposition between death – embodied by Herculano's family – and life – embodied by Geni's 'sunny' figure – is clearly established throughout Rodrigues's original play. Jabor's film version translates this visually in the contrast between the restraint of the two lugubrious family houses, and the freedom, energy and sound of the colourful brothel. What is clearly symbolized here using space and light is the traditional duality of Brazilian patriarchal life: the family household and the brothel as the two complementary poles of an old social order, ones which were supposed to be kept apart, connected only by the comings and goings of men. Given the archaic nature of his family, Herculano's mistake lies in his desire to connect these two worlds by integrating Geni, the prostitute, into the space of the family. Even before he is granted permission to marry, he secretly confines Geni to the second of the two family homes, the old secluded mansion, abandoned after the death of his first wife. Moved by jealousy of her life in the brothel, he places Geni within his own domain, starting a ridiculous game of seduction (fuelled by his desire) and restraint (caused by her strategic chastity) which seem completely out of place in this house haunted by death of his first wife. Geni's first contact with that space, her future tomb, seems already to prefigure her ultimate misfortune.

To free the couple from this uncomfortable deadlock, a sudden and melodramatic turn precipitates Herculano's son's change of heart about granting permission for them to marry. Disturbed by his father's continued affair, Serginho becomes drunk, is involved in a fight and goes to jail where he is raped by a cell mate, the so-called 'Bolivian bandit'. When Herculano finds out, he blames Geni, and their whole affair seems ruined. But her rescue fantasy is displaced onto the victimized Serginho, and coincides with the young man's own plans of revenge against his father. They start a secret love affair. Meanwhile, the family grants Herculano permission to marry Geni. Their wedding finally takes place, and thus gives birth to a bizarre version of a love triangle in which Serginho assures his

revenge through the incestuous love affair with his stepmother. For her part, Geni prefers Serginho, and Herculano is thus condemned to play dual, comic victim roles as the deceived husband and as the father outwitted by his son. But Serginho's hatred for his father turns out not to exclude Geni. Pretending to go away on a trip to 'forget all his recent traumas', he makes Geni take him to the airport only to witness the scene that reveals the true meaning of her life as a wife and stepmother: the image of her gaze is followed by the countershot of Serginho getting on the plane with his real, homosexual lover, the 'Bolivian bandit'. Back home, she kills herself, but first she tapes a message for Herculano in which she reveals all of the stratagems which had turned him into brother Patrício and his son Serginho's puppet. Before she dies, she curses Herculano's entire family, and also curses her breast, a symbol of the vanity which, in her view, helped the family to lead her to her death.



Toda Nudez Será Castigada –
Geni (Darlene Glória) tapes a
final message to her husband.
Picture courtesy: Cinemateca
Brasileira.

With this curse addressed to her breast, the character of Geni gives resonance to an internalization of Christian morality which has already been signalled in the film partly by her taste for premonitions ('I will die of breast cancer'). Feelings of guilt are at the root of her motherly rescue fantasies towards seemingly fragile men. They are

also at the root of her romantic masochism in her affair with Serginho (the one who seemed the weakest only to reveal himself to be the strongest). Geni, the character most akin to a vital force, becomes the principal victim in the plot of Herculano's family decadence. She allows her role as a substitute mother, replacing the 'other' in the home, to go too far. Her character ends up featuring in a displaced, tropical version of the gothic scenario in which a woman imprisoned in a morbid household becomes the victim of forces attached to the past. At the same time, her sad story ends in a bitter parody of another, more optimistic scenario in conventional melodrama, that of the redemption of a 'pretty woman', the tart with a heart of gold. Either way, Geni loses; the death forces embedded in an archaic moral code give proof of their fatal power. Nonetheless, she attracts our sympathy and exits the narrative with dignity.

The same, however, cannot be said of Herculano. His penchant for temporization and self-deception places him halfway between an archaic morality he has neither the strength nor the legitimate authority to sustain, and a modern sexual life he is afraid to assume. Under pressure, he chooses to mask his contradictions in a game of appearances, perversely manipulated by his own son, which ends with the unexpected revelation of all the lies that had sustained his good fortune. After a hard struggle and the apparent removal of all barriers, the self-assured father and ruler of the domestic sphere has to face his blatant fall and humiliation at the very moment when he might achieve happiness. The deceptions revealed by the taped message are not dwelt on by the film. Instead, the entire final sequence concentrates on, and profits from, the dramatic force of Geni's traumatic last day, the film ending with a closeup of her dead face near the room where Herculano finds the tape recorder. He has not been able to reconcile patriarchal law with his transgressive passion, but this unresolved contradiction does not make him a tragic hero. The major concern of the narrative has been to expose the internal workings of the family that ruin his life and kill Geni, all to the sound of Piazzola's tango.

In order to see the paterfamilias taking a further step beyond collapse and humiliation we have to wait for Jabor's *O Casamento* (1975), a film in which another 'fallen' paternal protagonist, Sabino, is given time at the end to display his radical choice of the Christian path of repentance and purification. Afflicted in a similar way to Herculano by the contradiction between his sexual drives and his moral values, Sabino (played by the same actor, Paulo Porto) is a mirror image of the protagonist of *Toda Nudez*, no stronger than him and no less ridiculous in his difficult moments, despite his final radical step. Sabino's difference lies in his readiness for action, clearly

demonstrated by his profession: he became wealthy through speculations in real estate, the corrupt business sector most involved in the disastrous and chaotic urban growth of modern Brazil.

In *O Casamento*, Jabor adapts Rodrigues's novel written in 1966, which once again displays the vicissitudes of a conservative father obsessed by a passionate and transgressive love, this time involving his own daughter. In this film, the father has already faced up to the truth when we meet him. The reversal of fortune has occurred the day before in a hectic chain of events involving many characters from several different social milieus this time. The plot of the film, like that of the original novel, seems much less structured than *Toda Nudez*, its dramatic condensation leading the mise-en-scene to the edges of hysteria. Intensive subplotting creates multiple mirror reflections around the protagonist, and while he will survive at the climax of the film, a working-class character will, in contrast, find his solution for suffering and frustration in crime and suicide. At the centre of the narrative there is the mind of a bourgeois man in crisis: Sabino, a nervous father ill at ease with his daughter's marriage. However, the wedding ceremony must be performed with perfection because it features among his strategies for social visibility arranged to seduce men in power – a government minister is expected to attend. On the other hand, deep inside, Sabino knows that the idea of 'giving' his daughter Gloria to another man has become quite unbearable.

The narrative begins on the morning of the wedding. Sabino is still lying in bed, assailed by nightmares. A carefully chosen opening sequence has already connected the public and the private spheres, providing a social framework for this family affair. Before showing Sabino in bed, a long credit sequence displays a series of images taken from one of Rio de Janeiro's summer floods, annual instances of social tragedy and death which are not unrelated to the real estate business, private profits and political corruption. This opening sequence sets the tone of the entire film, and establishes, with its images of mud, dirt, rats, pestilence and human suffering, the central metaphor of 'overflowing' which will permeate both the narrative and the unbounded behaviour of the characters. Among the images that make up Sabino's nightmare, there is the memory of his father's last words to him on the day he died: 'be a man of honour'. Sabino wakes up and starts walking around in his huge apartment. Looking at himself in a mirror, he repeats the words 'man of honour', while his face suggests a clear awareness of his unfulfilled promise. He goes to his daughter's bedroom and looks at her exposed body while she feigns sleep. In the living-room, the white bridal gown reveals the source of Sabino's crisis and, from the image of this disturbed man, the film takes us back in time to go over the events which have led to his present state. The action concentrates on the day before, and the film alternates between Sabino's experiences and

Gloria's recollections until, at sunset, they get together for a revealing scene on a deserted beach.

The flashback starts with Sabino travelling in the back seat of his chauffeur-driven car, complaining to his driver about the slowness of their journey, while a mob encircles the car looking at Sabino (and at the camera which is also inside the car). The tension caused by the crowd connotes once more the social context – here the extreme economic gap which separates Sabino from the people on the street – and creates a feeling of claustrophobia akin to the opening sequences of Fellini's *8½*. Sabino's arrival at his office brings temporary relief, but very soon Noemia, his secretary, announces the arrival of a visitor, Doctor Camarinha, the family gynaecologist, and the calamities of the day begin in earnest. Camarinha has come to tell Sabino that he has witnessed scenes involving his own assistant and Gloria's fiancé which make him suspect that the latter is homosexual. The Doctor insists that Sabino should cancel his daughter's wedding ceremony, which is due to take place the next day. Divided between his social duties and an unconfessed jealousy, Sabino does not receive the seemingly terrible revelation in the way one might expect. Instead of cancelling the wedding, he spends the whole day trying unsuccessfully to deal with both his compulsive sexual anxiety caused by his own desire for Gloria, and his uncontrollable urge to disclose his secrets. His first confession takes place in church, where he becomes hysterical and vomits. Among vague references to humanity's corruption, he narrates to the priest a shameful episode from his childhood: his mother masturbating grotesquely while lying on the bed beside him. His second confession is to Noemia, his secretary, with whom he arranges, for the first time, a sexual liaison in a filthy apartment that he keeps for such occasions. Once again he becomes hysterical, treating the secretary very badly, and he narrates another childhood episode when he was raped by a stronger and older boy. Obsessed with virility and, like Doctor Camarinha, troubled by the 'flood' of homosexuality, he plays out this act of self-flagellation in front of a woman who means nothing to him. This grotesque scene culminates with him shouting out for Gloria when sexually excited. Back in the office late in the afternoon, he vows to kill Noemia, but his daughter calls him, interrupting this latest hysterical attack. He leaves the office to meet her.

Meanwhile, in the film's parallel flashback depiction of the events involving Sabino's daughter on the day before her wedding, Gloria first pays a visit to her father's office where she is received as a goddess, with her father playing the role of the high priest. Flirtatious yet ambivalent, she is completely at ease with this worship. Her manner suggests some complicity with Sabino's secret desire for her, though not without a sadistic edge as when she announces that she will shortly visit Camarinha: 'the doctor wants to tell me something special. I am curious.' Throughout the flashback,

while Sabino discloses his own stories of sex and penetration, Gloria's mind circles around her first sexual experience. She will go to Camarinha to confess her own secret, to tell him that his son, now dead, was the man to whom she lost her virginity. At the doctor's office, she enacts a parody of confession, undressing herself and defying the doctor to 'attest to her chastity', in a guilt-free variation of her father's humiliating impulse to blend confession and sexuality. Later on in the film, her memories go further back to her sadistic affair with Camarinha's strange son, Antônio Carlos. On the only occasion when they had sexual intercourse, they had visited Doctor Camarinha's homosexual assistant. The latter, for his part, had chosen that day to take revenge on his homophobic father, who had been paralysed by a brain haemorrhage. Camarinha's assistant's plan was to be penetrated by his male lover right in front of his father. While the plan did not proceed as far as this, it was enough to excite Antônio Carlos and Gloria who went off to another room to have sex. And it was also enough to cause the death of the wheelchair-bound father. Later that day, Antônio Carlos had called Gloria to declare his feelings for her but she coldly rejected him. Shocked and frustrated, he committed suicide.

Gloria's recollections underline her competence in erotic games of aggression. On the beach, at sunset, she outwits her father who makes a fool of himself, betrayed by his own illusory assumptions as to the extent of his power and of her innocence. She provokes him by saying that he probably never loved her mother, and adds that she has never liked her mother herself, nor does she love her fiancé, but only 'the man I am forbidden to love'. Encouraged by her confession, Sabino imagines things are ready for his own crucial revelation of desire for her, and cannot stop himself from kissing her passionately. Stepping backwards and seeming extremely shocked, Gloria runs away, followed by her humiliated father who tries to explain himself. This pathetic scene finds resonance in the cathartic sequence which closes the intricate story involving Sabino's principal 'mirror image' in the film: Xavier, a sentimental working-class man, lover to Sabino's secretary, Noemia, and married to a woman deformed and blinded by leprosy. While Sabino is having his traumatic experience on the beach, Xavier, already upset by Noemia's constant lack of enthusiasm in their affair, overreacts to her rejection of him caused by her overblown expectations after the earlier liaison with Sabino. Xavier comes to see her at the office and she orders him to leave. This he does, but then returns to stab her many times, creating a blood bath in Sabino's deserted office. Xavier does not stop there; back home, he kills his wife and commits suicide.

The next day, Sabino calmly takes his daughter to the church, in spite of everything that has happened, including Noemia's death; 'it is the wedding that matters, above all', he keeps saying. At the end

of the ceremony, induced by the priest's eloquent sermon – 'we all have to acknowledge our leprosy' – Sabino quietly leaves the church to go to the police headquarters. As he comes upon the press waiting there for news of the murder, he performs his final, public act of confession, claiming that, in his office on the night before, he had killed his lover Noemia. He holds out his hands to be cuffed and allows himself to be arrested, with a smile on his face and his eyes turned to heaven, as if leaving all human bonds behind him. After Sabino's confession, the sound of the Wedding March plays over this final image of joy, reminding spectators of the priest's ridiculous speech and creating a gap between Sabino's spiritual intentions and the farcical scene of his arrest. Behaving like a character who has stepped from a Dostoyevsky novel, he does not find the appropriate context for a metaphysical leap. Moreover, there is a strong ironic distance between Sabino's view of his 'saintly' illumination and the dominant point of view in the film's narration. Failing to inspire empathy, he remains a pathetic, defeated bourgeois father, a man who finds a different imaginary resolution but is stricken by the same impotence as a whole set of other paternal characters in the film: Doctor Camarinha is a ruined man after his son's suicide; his assistant's father from the suburbs died in his wheelchair; and the working-class Xavier turned to unbridled aggression and suicide. The similarity in the predicaments of these characters strongly suggests some kind of narrative orchestration, one which demands the display of misery and male impotence. I have already referred to the late 1960s and early 1970s crisis in Brazilian patriarchal morality but, beyond this ironic treatment of conservative fathers and archaic family values, there is one question which remains. This concerns the particular point of view behind Jabor's depiction of the younger generation: the sons and daughters. In other words, on whose behalf and on whose terms is Jabor's irony addressed to the *paterfamilias*?

Up until this point, in my discussion of *Toda Nudez* and *O Casamento*, something has remained implicit: the tone of both narratives and their presumed tragicomic effect. Although they follow the fathers quite closely, the narratives do not seem to propose a moral identification with them. The protagonists are subjected to a kind of ironic anatomical investigation that reveals their weaknesses and deep contradictions. Neither villains nor enemies, the two patriarchs Herculano and Sabino are shown as victims of their own system of values. Their sad stories are offered up as parables which, through exaggeration and the melodramatic rule of transparency, expose their deepest impulses and their effect on the social dynamics of the family. Social types at odds with the ways of the world, they find an imaginary resolution in the fabric of suffering which is, in

melodrama, the most represented kind of response to reality. In both films a kitsch melodrama is lived out by those conservative figures who take themselves seriously as virtuous victims. Yet the narrative, always keeping them at a distance, seems to frame this in a modern, satirical melodrama, or tragicomedy, which discloses the illusory nature of their redemption. On this level, their defeat is taken as if it were a matter for laughter, not for tears. It is not difficult, of course, to find the victors in these stories. The children, Serginho and Gloria, contribute enormously to their fathers' falls. Their final move into the arms of homosexual partners brings into the family a taste of that 'flood' of homosexuality which feeds the paterfamilias's paranoia. For the young, the final act of both dramas is an occasion for revenge; in this sense, theirs is the final laugh. However, we are far from the kind of optimistic comedy which celebrates the joyous victory of the son or daughter over the authority of the father, the kind where marriage always means a happy ending.

Serginho does smile to the camera before getting into the aeroplane. But his sarcastic smile is directed not at his father Herculano but, first of all, at the gaze of their shared lover, the prostitute Geni. It is she who is seen as the victim of his aggression, a detail which connotes Serginho's gesture as a last perverse stroke from the morbid family which he, despite his escape, still represents. If there is a figure to whom we feel closest in *Toda Nudez* it is Geni, a character who signifies life, pleasure and giving, however clumsy her conduct may be. In the end, such a feeling is only reinforced by the film's concentration on her drama and despair, which culminate in the powerful scene of her curse on Herculano's and Serginho's family. Throughout the film Serginho's behaviour, in contrast to Geni's, is shown as egotistical. The revelation of his plot to destroy her prevents an identification with his point of view. The final impact in the film comes from the shot of Geni's dead face: it condenses the moral effect of the whole story which is, in any case, completely mediated by the sound of her recorded voice.

Gloria's wedding at the end of *O Casamento* does not represent a liberation from the past, from the perverse game she has shared with her father in which her effectiveness in aggression gave her the advantage. From the outset, her sexual life, like that of her father Sabino, is connected to death and to sadomasochistic scenarios which she is easily capable of manipulating for her own ends, regardless of the consequences. Self-centred, she is the embodiment of seduction with all its ambivalence. She is the strong woman who, within the perspective of the film, does not come to the foreground as the source of another point of view, but who remains instead simply the object of an exterior view. Her figure and manners display a narcissistic touch which is gradually associated with the codes of the femme fatale as visually represented by the film's quotation of *fin-de-siècle* decadence. This reference indicates very clearly that she is

conceived of as a symptom, as a charming flower of decadence symbiotically attached to a whole set of fragile figures – Antônio Carlos, Doctor Camarinha's assistant, and her absent fiancé.

Ineffective as the locus of legitimate point of view, the younger generation, as represented in both films, exhibits a behaviour that can be described as symptomatic, for it derives overwhelmingly from the status quo. There is something vicious in the son's and daughter's schemes of revenge and their stratagems to liberate themselves from the patriarchal order. Despite their effectiveness in humiliating the fathers, we are not encouraged to see Herculano's and Sabino's falls through the younger generation's victorious gaze. There is no hope in either of these films which prefer, instead, to stress that the young people's strategies are mechanisms of reproduction rather than of overcoming, an ongoing force of sameness with all its social and individual costs.

At the end of *Toda Nudez*, Jabor seems to side with the vibrant young woman who is completely destroyed by the archaic family game. Meanwhile, *O Casamento* enacts the patriarch's illusory redemption in a manner which appears aware that it is an entire collective style that wins out when Sabino makes his public stand surrounded by the 'masses' at the police headquarters, and is merged into the Messianic. This moment of delirium in which he encounters the people, finding partners among them for his theatre of salvation, frames Jabor's allegory of Brazilian political life. Sabino's pragmatism and economic success might have caused his initial isolation from the collectivity as represented in the opening sequence of the film, where he is shown alone in the car surrounded by the mob. In contrast, Sabino's hieratic trance when handcuffed by the police becomes an instance of social communion, almost an occasion for a political rally similar to those shown in Rocha's *Terra em Transe* and whose atmosphere Jabor recalls again at the cathartic moment of his film. Jabor's style of representation stresses an ironic view of this communion: it is the great apotheosis of illusion, which is followed at the very end of the film by the return of the same urban flood seen in the overture; a flood that, with its biblical overtones and promises of plague, closes the circle of representation. This acute metaphor for 'Brazilian misery' provides the final framework for the 'humiliation of the father', inscribing Jabor's film within the Cinema Novo trend of totalizing views of society.

It could be said, then, that in Brazil there exists a polarity between the modern, which isolates, and the archaic, which congregates. It is easy to understand why the military regime exploited this patriarchal tradition, on an ideological level at least, in order to maintain social cohesion, to seduce the middle classes and to create a source of authority which could discipline society, even though its own most

effective social bases were of a more technocratic sort, engaged in a very modern capitalism. It should be noted, though, that, once this mechanism has been detected, it would be a mistake to attribute to the archaic/modern binary a mutually exclusive opposition. Brazil has clearly shown how the dialectical association of these two poles has repeated itself throughout history, the strength of each one of these terms and their manner of interaction altering itself according to specific historical conjunctures. This is one of the reasons why the allegory of the 1964 military *coup d'état* in *Terra em Transe* had such a big impact on 1960s culture, for it placed the patriarch, a figure from the most archaic reaches of national symbolism, right at the very centre of the scheming behind that *coup*. Positing recent history as a drama of palace intrigues, obsessions and melancholia in keeping with Walter Benjamin's concept of baroque theatre, Rocha's film found a brilliant way of condensing a specifically Brazilian tradition of political 'solutions' which have marked the nation's history ever since Independence, where the contrivances of social, economic and political elites have frequently masqueraded as 'revolutions'. For left wingers, *Terra em Transe* crystallized an imagery that was capable of connoting, at the very heart of the conservative triumph of 1964, the return of a violence whose decisive agent was that section of the dominant class formerly comprised of slave owners. These heirs to the Portuguese colonizers gave birth to a rural patriarchy of Iberian descent, considered still to be actively influential in Brazil during the 1960s despite industrialization, the rise of new middle classes, intense urbanization and the increasing entry of women into different spheres of work including high public administration. Although present in the plot of *Terra em Transe*, the military ranks and the modernizing bourgeoisie with their material interests are far from undertaking the leadership of the authoritarian regime. Instead, it is Porfirio Diaz who monopolizes this role in the film. As the father figure representing tradition and the Christian family, he is shown to orchestrate the conservative victory, displaying in his triumphal parade the grotesque characteristics of a fascinating fascism under the critical eye of Cinema Novo.

The post-*Terra em Transe* trend towards the production of dramas of bourgeois decadence – one which, as we have seen, *Toda Nudez* comments on with its reformulation of Rocha's tracking shot in its own opening sequence – corresponds to a desire to undermine the ideological tenets of the military regime. This is achieved by means of a curious operation which requires the constant representation in these dramas of impotent and self-pitying father figures in decline, in order to sabotage the values associated with the symbolic figure of the strong father. After *Terra em Transe*, such ironic 'trials of the family' appeared not only in Brazilian cinema, but throughout the entire field of cultural production, involving theatre and popular

- 5 Tropicalism emerged at the end of 1967, first in popular music and theatre, then in film, partially as a response to *Terra em Transe*. Its overall strategy produced a significant shift in the articulation of basic questions concerning cultural nationalism, political art, the avant garde and underdevelopment. It directed a radical critique at the 'dualist view' of Brazil, eliminating the distinction between pure national folklore and 'corrupt' urban culture, blending modern and archaic techniques, assuming with good humour or bitter irony the syncretic nature of the Brazilian experience.
- 6 Another interesting example of this is Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's adaptation of Dalton Trevisan's short stories in his bitter comedy, *Guerra Conjugal/Conjugal War* (1975). Once more, the parodic incursion into domestic drama, with the brothel again acting as a counterpoint, is guided by a gradual deconstruction of male sexual power in a series of episodes which subvert the so-called 'pornochanchada', a kind of erotic comedy which was very popular in Brazil during the 1970s.
- 7 There is no space here to analyse in detail Jabor's *Tudo Bem/It's All Right* (1978) with its humiliated protagonist, Juarez, an even more fragile father figure than Herculano and Sabino, and its transgressive figures from the younger generation who, like Serginho and Gloria, neither encourage spectatorial identification nor optimism for the future.

music in a movement called Tropicalism, 1968 being the year of its greatest impulse.⁵ Patriarchy became, then, a basic target for Tropicalism due to its central role in the legitimization of censorship and in other repressive measures adopted by the military regime. Filmmakers were thus seen to be engaged in a left-wing critical programme aimed at revealing the backward, provincial nature of the regimes' ideological enterprise, all the time pointing at what they saw as the *continuum* of patriarchal power, from the public, political sphere through to the private, domestic sphere.

I have singled out Jabor since, among other reasons, I would argue that this approach achieved its greatest success when filmmakers drew attention to social sectors and experiences where it was still possible to detect the survival of the archaic amid the modern, as in the films examined above.⁶ Perhaps nobody has ever articulated such total dismissal not only of the patriarchs but also of the potential for change embodied by the younger generations as Jabor does in *Toda Nudez* and *O Casamento*.⁷ One might say that this irony contains some sort of wise realism, but I would like to question this by suggesting certain affinities between Jabor's wide-ranging pessimism and other, older forms of disenchantment whose origins, themselves being of a moral character, involve frustration and resentment. In fact, one might discern in this presupposition of a general and inevitable corruption, a peculiar convergence involving the common sense of a culture which felt the impact of psychoanalysis as well as of an age-old, moralist tradition whose formulas have been condensed for centuries in a saying by La Rochefoucauld: 'Vice is the moving principle of all actions'. This last convergence of the old and the new provides yet another instance of the dialectic of the archaic and the modern. But it might also prove to be rather controversial when discussing the work of a filmmaker whose extremely pessimistic portrayal of patriarchal decadence may, depending on the tone and style of representation, slip into a conservative attitude as it articulates these earlier traditions of moral diatribe.

I do not postulate the presence of such a convergence in Jabor's films as a general hypothesis. I suggest it instead as a provocation, based on evidence which I feel indicates that the cinematic criticism of patriarchal values gained in dramatic strength precisely when filmmakers like Jabor adapted the work of the playwright Nelson Rodrigues for the screen. This was, after all, paradoxically a writer devoted to the defence of the *coup d'état*, one who was ironic in calling himself a reactionary and zealous in publicly avowing his Catholicism. Rodrigues's resistance to modernization, both before and after 1964, translated itself in works which depict a world of vanities and resentments, and of individual subjects who are unhappy because they are set apart from a state of purity that no historical experience can really offer. They are solitary figures who unite for mutual

destruction because they find themselves in the 'most cynical age'. Before the films which borrowed his stories and dramas, Rodrigues was the most insistent artist in Brazil when it came to dissecting masculine failure, displaying the figure of the guilty father and of the feeble husband, the heads of households who partake in the dissolution of values which prove incapable of fulfilling the role tradition had in store for them. There is an interesting debate to be had concerning the specific purport of Rodrigues's plays, because their agility, powers of observation and modern language define that space of ambiguity which is particular to works that exceed the expression of one author's ideas. Filmmakers associated with Cinema Novo, including Jabor, consciously worked out this ambiguity in their interpretations of his dramas. They assumed Rodrigues's acute criticism of the present, no doubt made in the name of a purity which is, after all, abstract. But they transformed these elements into a tool for ideological unmasking, carried out in the same manner as their original, forceful and sarcastic appropriation of Rodrigues's melodramatic material. However, one must recognize the traditional discourses of moralism, mixed with a touch of psychoanalysis, that Cinema Novo came to share in this way with the conservative dramatist at the moment when it launched its attack against a patriarchy that was in decline, although recycled by the ideological strife.

The dialectics of the archaic and the modern become, then, a facet of this cinema that could so easily recognize it as a distinctive sign of that very Brazilian modernity from which this same cinema felt itself to be symbolically exiled. In this reading, films such as *Toda Nudez* and *O Casamento* result in aggressive transfigurations of the critical distance adopted by young filmmakers in the face of the processes of modernization because of the direction it took when the technical-economic development of Brazil came to be administered by the military.

Modernity, masculinity and Imperfect Cinema in Cuba

CATHERINE DAVIES

The Cuban film industry (ICAIC) was founded by the Cuban Government in March 1959, just two months after the victory of the Revolution. Its objective was the domestic production, distribution and screening of films which recorded the ongoing revolutionary process from the perspective of ordinary people. The films, shot on location and featuring local people, were shown free of charge across the country in city cinemas and on makeshift village screens to spectators who were encouraged to participate actively in the films' reception and interpretation. Although there was a certain amount of technical know-how in Cuba (film crews and directors, some trained in Rome, had made films throughout the 1940s and 1950s), funding, equipment and modern technology were in short supply. This situation was aggravated after 1960 when many skilled technicians left Cuba taking their equipment with them. In view of these social directives and material constraints, it is scant cause for surprise that the genre which dominated Cuban cinema production throughout the 1960s was the documentary or fictional short, shot on 8mm or 16mm film (often with hand-held cameras), demanding minimum technical input and maximum creative improvisation. Feature films (the first made in 1960) also incorporated direct cinema and documentary techniques. Against all the odds, within the first decade of its existence the Cuban film industry had gained an international reputation; it was the prime mover of what was subsequently known as New Latin American Cinema and it served as inspiration for Third Cinema production across the world.

- 1 Julio García Espinosa, 'For an imperfect cinema', in Michael Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-five Years of the New Latin American Cinema* (London: British Film Institute/Channel Four Television, 1983), pp. 28–33, 28.
- 2 See K.S. Kovács, 'Revolutionary consciousness and imperfect cinematic forms', *Humanities in Society*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1981), pp. 101–12, for a comparison of the Hollywood format with Imperfect cinema.
- 3 Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), p. 13.
- 4 Michael Chanan, *The Cuban Image* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), p. 3.
- 5 Teshome H. Gabriel, 'Towards a critical theory of Third World films', in Pines and Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema*, pp. 30–50, 35.
- 6 Paulo Antonio Paranagua (ed.), *Le Cinéma Cubain* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1990), pp. 91–98, 98. My translation.
- 7 Oscar Quirós, 'Critical mass of Cuban cinema: art as the vanguard of society', *Screen*, vol. 37, no. 3 (1996), pp. 279–93.

By 1970 these revolutionary ideas and practices had been formulated into a theory of cinema or, more precisely, an aesthetic, a 'new poetics'. Labelled in Latin America as Imperfect Cinema it was hailed as the continent's response to the Hollywood industry which since the 1920s had monopolized film production. Filmmakers such as Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (Argentina) and Julio García Espinosa (Cuba), whose 1970 *Cine cubano* article 'For an imperfect cinema' began with the words 'nowadays perfect cinema – technically and artistically masterful – is almost always reactionary cinema',¹ turned material shortcomings into an advantage.

If Perfect Cinema was technically 'perfect', expressing a conformist ideology in seemingly neutral forms by means of non-intrusive camerawork creating an illusion of the real, Imperfect Cinema on the other hand (taking its cue from Italian Neorealism, French New Wave and cinema verité) was creative, popular art challenging the mass culture of acquiescent consumption.² It aimed to present a plurality of non-judgmental, non-prescriptive expositions of the problems faced by 'people who struggle' as a process: in García Espinosa's words 'to show the process of a problem is like showing the very development of the news item, without commentary'. Its preferred form was critical socialist realism which simultaneously produced and undermined the illusion of the real. In this respect Imperfect Cinema encouraged critical–cognitive 'lucidity', as well as the emotive–utopian aspects of cultural work.³ Cuban cinema thus positioned itself at the cutting edge of countercinema practice.

By the mid 1970s, however, a shift was noted. Cuban films tended to reject early artisanal aesthetics for what some critics saw as conformist Hollywood models. According to Michael Chanan, by the end of the decade Cuban film had forfeited its vanguard position to the plastic arts.⁴ Similarly, for Teshome Gabriel, Cuban films made in the late 1970s 'regressed' towards Hollywood imitations.⁵ This shift is usually attributed to a clamp-down in Cuban cultural policy enforcing tighter controls on artistic creation during the 'grey quinquennium' (1971–5). After 1976 ICAIC lost its autonomy and became dependent on the Ministry of Culture (this policy was reversed in 1988). By the 1980s 'it was obvious that Cuban cinema was broadening its appeal at the expense of its thematic and linguistic audacity'.⁶ Whether as a result of increased output, (self) censorship, or, more worryingly, a deep crisis of belief in socialism, too many escapist films were being routinely produced for mass entertainment. Cuban cinema of the 1980s had lost its critical edge.

A counter-argument, presented by Oscar Quirós in an article published recently in *Screen*, posits that post-1976 Cuban cinema did maintain its vanguard role precisely because it freed itself from the outmoded traits of Marxist orthodoxy.⁷ This view, nevertheless, implicitly relegates Imperfect Cinema to the level of political propaganda while suggesting that non-political Perfect Cinema

(ideology-free and conceived as an aesthetic) is more incisive. There is a need, I believe, to restate the ongoing revolutionary potential of Imperfect Cinema, especially from a feminist point of view. Cuban cinema may well have moved away from orthodox Marxism but has this resulted in more compelling films? A vanguard role may be claimed for certain Perfect Cinema films whose pleasurable formal and aesthetic qualities encourage wish-fulfilment through identification for a critical purpose: *Adorables Mentiras/Adorable Lies* (1991), for example, deploys the Hollywood format ironically to effect a forceful but sympathetic critique of contemporary Cuban society.⁸ But surely a vanguard role cannot be claimed for melodramas such as *La Bella del Alhambra/The Beauty of the Alhambra* (1989), a sentimental costume drama, and *Cartas del parque/Letters from the Park* (1988), a reworking of the Cyrano de Bergerac theme based on García Márquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

Paradoxically, the decline of Cuban Imperfect Cinema in the 1980s has coincided with renewed critical attention to Third Cinema elsewhere. Prompted by this recent interest in a non-Euro-American cinema that aims to challenge industrial monopolies and 'to speak a socially pertinent discourse which both the mainstream and the authorial cinemas exclude from their realms of signification',⁹ I hope to demonstrate the ongoing significance of Imperfect Cinema, arguing that 1980s post-Marxist films are less critical and effective.

To illustrate this point I will focus on the themes of masculinity and modernity in two interrelated films: *De cierta manera/One Way or Another* (1974, released in 1977),¹⁰ directed and scripted by Sara Gómez a black woman, born in 1943, who died of asthma before the film was finished; and *Hasta cierto punto/Up to a Point* (1983, released 1984), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Gómez worked as an assistant director for Gutiérrez Alea, amongst others, making short documentaries. After her death, Gutiérrez Alea completed Gómez's film although, as Michael Chanan points out, the editing was almost complete and the commentary planned but not written. Some five years later, Gutiérrez Alea made *Hasta cierto punto* and dedicated it to Gómez.

Sara Gómez's film is about a middle-class school teacher, Yolanda, who is sent to teach on a new Havana housing estate. The film follows her stormy relationship with Mario, a black factory worker, who resents her independence and finds it difficult to moderate his *machista* outlook. Gutiérrez Alea's film is about a middle-class scriptwriter, Oscar, who is making a documentary on machismo among Havana dockworkers. The film traces Oscar's fraught relationship with one of the workers, Lina, which comes to nothing because he refuses to leave his wife. The two films deal with the psychosexual effects of social and economic change on men and women. The Imperfect *De cierta manera* is the more critical of the

8 Catherine Davies, 'Recent Cuban fiction films: identification, interpretation, disorder', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1996), pp. 177–92. The film was scripted by Senel Paz who wrote the screenplay for *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1993).

9 Pines and Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema*, p. 10.

10 Recently shown with the title *Sort Of* at the National Film Theatre in London, November 1996, as part of the 'A Century of Women's Film-making: Latin America' season. The film was codirected by Daniel Díaz Torres, famous for *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas/Alice in Wondertown* (1991) which was banned in Cuba.

two and, despite its apparently didactic style, the least ideologically bound, due to its structuring principle, its use of various types of documentary footage, and its complex referencing of the themes of masculinity and modernity. The seamless perfection of *Hasta cierto punto*, representing (to a greater extent) classical narrative aesthetics, tends to smother the profound social problems highlighted dramatically in Gómez's film.

The social tensions in the films are the result of accelerated modernization in post-Revolutionary Cuba, an understanding of which is facilitated by Habermas's interpretation of modernity. For Habermas, modernization is the mobilization of resources, increased productivity, centralized political power, the formation of national identities, urbanization, participatory politics, schooling and secularization. Modernity's project is Enlightenment thinking; but Enlightenment (or subject-centred reason) involves a process of differentiation between the spheres of the Economy, Art and the Polity which leads to increasing alienation for the individual. Habermas's contribution to post-Marxist theory is the idea that these spheres may be reintegrated, and the individual liberated at the level of public language: 'noncoercive intersubjectivity of mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition'. Thus he reappropriates 'the enhanced significance of the aesthetic': vanguard Art is the prime means of emancipating culture from the Polity and the Economy; the 'explosive power' of aesthetic experience liberates and decentres subjectivity from routine convention. Art is most potentially liberating and able to challenge political hegemony, therefore, when it is least formally structured.¹¹

Sara Gómez's film is certainly less cohesive than Gutiérrez Alea's, to the extent that while the latter adopts the classic narrative form, with some interesting divergences, the former borders on the amateurish and chaotic. Gutiérrez Alea's film is technically sophisticated; it is shot in colour by cinematographer Mario García Joya (of *Strawberry and Chocolate* fame), editing is continuous, and the narrative flow chronological. Gómez's film is deliberately shot in black and white on 16 mm film subsequently blown up to 35 mm. The grainy effect (enhanced by accidental damage to the negative after her death) plus the frantic camera movement and mobile framing result in a film which is not pleasurable to watch. The narrative is continually interrupted by extra-diegetic material and jolts forward in fits and starts. Both films incorporate documentary footage but they do so quite differently; it is here that Gómez most keenly exploits the radical potential of dynamic disjunction. Gutiérrez Alea's film intercalates video clips of six interviews with dockers; Gómez's includes all manner of documentary film: interviews, newsreel, reportage, biographical synopses, montage, text on the screen, and excerpts from other films such as Fernando Birri's *Tire Dié/Throw us a Dime* (1958) and what appears to be Luis Buñuel's *Los*

11 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. viii, xvi, 2, 113.

12 Enrique Colina, 'Entrevista a Tomás Gutiérrez Alea sobre "Hasta cierto punto"', in *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Poesía y revolución* (Islas Canarias: Filmoteca Canaria, 1994), pp. 183–91, 190.

Olvidados/The Young and the Damned (1950). The two films favour critical realism, but while Gutiérrez Alea aimed to 'create an impression of formal transparency' in which distancing devices are deliberately avoided ('you're unaware of the photography . . . because it's never in the foreground'),¹² Sara Gómez's film is more like an ironic collage than a narrative feature.

Another strategy for the reintegration of the Polity separated from Art and the Economy in modern societies, according to Habermas, is to foreground subjectivity. In *Hasta cierto punto*, closeups and soft focusing certainly encourage identification with individual personalities, whereas the structuring principle of *De cierta manera* is a complex interaction between the individual and the type. It could be argued that Perfect Cinema's emphasis on the rounded individual rather than the socialist realist type is in itself revolutionary. In Quirós's view the most radical Cuban films are critical of a socialist bureaucracy which limits individual fulfilment. Unlike *De cierta manera*, *Hasta cierto punto* does attack state policies which hamper production and demoralize the worker, but the extent of this criticism is minimal compared to Gutiérrez Alea's earlier Imperfect film, *Muerte de un burócrata/Death of a Bureaucrat* (1966) or Juan Carlos Tabío's *¡Plaff!* (1988), made in the so-called Perfect Cinema period. *¡Plaff!* also targets state bureaucracy, but in order to do so and, at the same time, lampoon Imperfect Cinema, it adopts an exaggerated Imperfect Cinema style. Similarly, with respect to subjectivity as process, I suggest more insight is offered by Gómez's film than Gutiérrez Alea's.

At first sight the two films have much in common. Both are about gender roles and the way endemic machismo limits modernization in Cuba. The documentary footage in *De cierta manera* presents a broad sweep of Cuban cultural history in relation to contemporary political and moral issues within a framework of process, renewal and change. In *Hasta cierto punto*, the spheres of art, production and morality are also interrelated, but the issue of modernity is less explicit. The footage in *De cierta manera* is employed ironically to provide a critical counterpoint to what appear to be overtly didactic aims, while the video clips in *Hasta cierto punto* merely confirm the film's message: Cuban machismo is rife everywhere. In *Hasta cierto punto* the clips focus mainly on production problems; this undermines its feminist potential by suggesting that gender issues are not as important. The result is a sentimental romance, which goes nowhere, couched in an overview of Cuban society as experiencing stasis and paralysis at the levels of production, morality and art. For Zuzana Pick, 'it is as if the sociological purpose of the issues raised in the videotaped segments is progressively eclipsed by traditional melodramatic convention'.¹³

Both films focus on a love affair between working people in which one of the partners belongs to a more middle-class background

13 Zuzana Pick, *The New Latin America Cinema: a Continental Project* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1993), pp. 47–54, 51.

than the other: Yolanda (white middle class) and Mario (black working class) in Gómez's film; Lina (white working class) and Oscar (white middle class) in Gutiérrez Alea's. Both films are shot in working locations (a bus factory; the docks) featuring production lines and working-class culture, and in both opening sequences spectators are invited into workers' meetings. In *De cierta manera* the two speakers in the meeting are men; the subject of the discussion is one man's personal life. In *Hasta cierto punto* the main speaker is a woman; the subject of her intervention is a collective problem (substandard working conditions). In Gutiérrez Alea's film the most persuasive speaker is the woman who demands improvements in the building fabric of the factory (that is, modernization in order to increase production). In Sara Gómez's film a man offers a public apology for shirking work and lays the blame on a woman (his mother) for his anti-revolutionary behaviour. In fact his sexual promiscuity hampers his productive potential, but he uses a woman as a scapegoat nevertheless.

What *Hasta cierto punto* represents on one level, then, is an improved situation for Cuban women, at least as far as the State is concerned. Lina, the protagonist, points this out to Oscar when she says that working men are more respectful to women now (in 1983) than they were when she first started at the docks in 1971 (at the time, more or less, when *De cierta manera* was being made). In both films it is the reactionary attitudes of men (a working man in *De cierta manera* and a middle-class man in *Hasta cierto punto*) which stall revolutionary progress, and in both it is the female protagonist (a middle-class woman in *De cierta manera* and a working-class woman in *Hasta cierto punto*) who most clearly represents the revolution and pushes for change. The two men resist change at the level of their personal lives (the family and home) but are forced to confront their prejudices in order to satisfy their sexual desire. The male ego, based on power and privilege, is seen to be under threat; the personal is ostensibly political. A comparison of these two openings suggests that *Hasta cierto punto* is the more radical of the two in that it portrays an articulate woman (Lina) who represents not only the revolution but also the proletariat (unlike middle-class Yolanda) and focuses on machismo not only among the workers but also among the middle classes. Sexual politics would seem to be privileged over class politics.

The concluding moments of the two films elicit a rather different evaluation. In Gómez's film, the final sequence shows a man and a woman walking off energetically into the distance (a modern street flanked with modern buildings), that is, into the future. They walk close together but are obviously arguing or exchanging views. They thus continue the argument staged throughout the film between the middle-class teacher, Yolanda, and her working-class lover, Mario. The teacher engages physically, emotionally and intellectually with

the metalworker. Both come with pre-revolutionary cultural baggage (her class prejudice and his sexism and secret society beliefs), and they work throughout the film to thrash out their multiple differences: differences of gender, race, ethnicity, religion and class. They fight as equals (her power derives from her race and social status, his from his masculinity, understood here as power and prestige arrangements attached to gender). The documentary scenes which focus on other lives (the ex-boxer Guillermo Díaz, the single mother La Mejicana) situated firmly in their social contexts, make the entire film an exercise in dialogics. The two protagonists seek a way out of binaries and contradictions. The film is not foreclosed; the dialectical process must continue.

Gómez's two protagonists crucially embody Habermas's description of communicative (rather than subject-centred) reason. What he referred to as the 'paradigm of the knowledge of objects' has to be replaced by 'the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech action' if alienation is to be avoided in modernity. Central to this paradigm of mutual understanding is the

performative attitude of participants in interaction who coordinate their plans for action by coming to an understanding about something in the world. Where ego carries out a speech act and alter takes up a position with regard to it, the two parties enter into an interpersonal relationship.¹⁴

In *De cierta manera* intersubjectivity (between Yolanda and Mario) avoids the kind of subject-object relationships (objectivization) in force between Oscar and Lina.

The final sequence of *Hasta cierto punto* is very different. This film, focused predominantly from the male protagonist's point of view, shows how a working girl, Lina, engages physically (up to a point) and intellectually (up to a point) with a middle-class man, Oscar. She is not positioned as his equal or his interlocutor, but merely as a sex object or, as Pick indicates, his object of research.¹⁵ He fails to listen to her opinions, for example, when she tells him machismo is everywhere, not just among dockers, thus invalidating the purpose of his film, and points out the irony of shooting a film on machismo with an all-male crew. She even apologizes for having an opinion on the matter ('perhaps I'm wrong'). There is no sense of dialogue, exchange of views, or 'interpersonal communication'.

More problematically, both Oscar and the film itself (in the final soft-focus shots, in the pre-credit presentation of the Basque love-song lyrics, and in Gutiérrez Alea's own comments)¹⁶ encapsulate Lina in the image of a bird (a seagull) which should not be caught because it ought to fly free. Clearly, this is meant to suggest a feminist agenda. The outmoded, clichéd topos (a seagull usually represents a vulgar, raucous woman in Hispanic tradition) is not only

¹⁴ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 296–7.

¹⁵ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, p. 53.

¹⁶ He stated the final scenes could be read as a literal representation of Oscar's thoughts, although he (Gutiérrez Alea) wanted the audience to realize that 'Lina can fly off somewhere, she can fly like a bird'. This is Gutiérrez Alea's reading, not Oscar's. James Roy Macbean, 'A dialogue with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea on the dialectics of the spectator in "Hasta cierto punto"', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1985), pp. 22–9, 29.

Inequality of communication in
Hasta cierto punto.
 Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.



presented diegetically, when Lina listens to Oscar's record of the Basque song and thinks the lyrics are 'lovely', but is also performed literally when in the final moments of the film the female protagonist (at one point, compared by Oscar to an aeroplane) takes flight. Lina is a sexual fantasy for Oscar. She tells him not to confuse her with the fictional character of his projected film (to be played by his wife) but he takes no notice as the closing sequences indicate. Like Sara Gómez's film, *Hasta cierto punto* is not foreclosed, there is no resolution to the problem, but rather than ending on a dialectical note the film ends in pure escapism or, rather, expulsion. The woman is expelled from the drama altogether; the exit of the woman provides the resolution of the problem. This is a limp conclusion which spoils the film's credentials as a critique of sexism in Cuba (see Gutiérrez Alea's interview with Colina): as Lina pointed out, women (lovers and wives) are exploited mentally and physically by men across the social spectrum. The film is as feeble as Oscar, who is himself a representation of the ICAIC scriptwriter.¹⁷

Unlike Mario, who flaunts his masculinity and openly resists change, Oscar is emasculated from the start. He is castrated by the authority of a system (authoritarian paternalism, represented by Arturo, the film director) with which he colludes. Mario, for all his faults, is aware of his own limitations and strives to find a solution. In Sara Gómez's film personal relations in which men and women are positioned as equals may be liberating; they are the site of revolutionary activity and further change. In *Hasta cierto punto* personal relations interfere with revolutionary culture (Arturo's film); they lead Oscar to question Arturo's dogmatic ideas but end in impasse. Oscar is ineffectual and dominated (he does not leave his wife; he pleads for 'more time', and is rendered inactive).¹⁸ Arturo explains his film project to Oscar's wife, Marian, telling her she will

¹⁷ Gutiérrez Alea refers to this explicit tension between the creative artist and the authoritarian film director in an interview with Senel Paz in *Areito*, vol. 10, no. 37 (1984), pp. 44–7. The relationship between the writer and the director was not sufficiently developed, due partly to the miscasting of Omar Valdés in the role of Arturo, the director.

¹⁸ In Julio E. Miranda's words, 'But Oscar is so weak and inauthentic when compared to the beautiful, solidly resolute Lina' 'Retrato de Habaneras' (Notas sobre cierto cine cubano de los ochenta)', in *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, no. 476 (February 1990).

play the role of the female dockworker and that in the film she will have a 'macho' boyfriend, not a 'wimp [*maricón*] like him', he says, pointing to Oscar. Marian asks if Arturo will castrate the macho worker; no, he replies, only criticize him (the irony being that the greatest *machista* in the film is Arturo himself). Marian then tells Oscar not to get a complex. But Oscar's masculinity is often questioned in the film: for example, he is the one who avoids sex with his wife, adducing a headache. Like its male protagonist, *Hasta cierto punto* is a castrated film in as much as it loses its vigour and authority. Its powerlessness verges on paralysis, and paralysis stalls modernization.

The most radical aspect of *De cierta manera*, however, is its use of documentary footage. Feminist film critics E. Ann Kaplan and Annette Kuhn have drawn attention to the way it encapsulates two films in one: a documentary and a narrative. For Kaplan, external social change is recounted in the documentary form, internal psychosexual change in the fictional form. More importantly, for Kuhn the socialist realist narrative of the love story creates an illusion of reality but this illusion is continually undercut by documentary realism, which is itself continually undercut by distancing devices. The result is frustrated expectations on the part of the spectator 'because the film offers no single internally consistent discourse'. The film makes the spectator aware of the 'seduction of narrative'.¹⁹ *De cierta manera*, then, 'deconstructs the conventions of Hollywood cinema and socialist realist narrative and traditional documentary' by playing off one form against the other.²⁰

The love story is repeatedly interrupted by the documentary, showing scenes of buildings in the process of demolition. The booming produced by the iron ball and chain resounds loudly throughout the film, even through the music of the final credits. The buildings are houses: the hovels of the poor and the apartments of the more wealthy. The inference is, of course, that the Revolution is in the process of destroying the in-built prejudices of the past, ridding the country of poverty, razing class differences to the ground, and providing the opportunity for moral renewal. Just in case the symbolism is missed, the clipped tones of a voiceover spell out the revolutionary programme for the construction of a new society, spouting forth facts, figures and social analysis at an alarming rate.

What has not been noted quite so frequently is the allusion in these scenes to the demolition of the ego. In his discussion of Freudian ego defence mechanisms, Anthony Easthope refers specifically to the masculine ego, often represented in dreams as a building (a castle or fort) under siege, as follows: 'The masculine ego is generally imaged as a military fortification . . . closing itself off completely, maintaining total defence', 'when the feminine seems to have infiltrated within . . . it threatens the whole castle'; 'the feminine is a security risk'.²¹ The ego under threat in *De cierta*

19 E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 190, 193.

20 Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Verso, 1982) pp. 157–8, 161.

21 Anthony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do* (London: Paladin, 1986), pp. 37, 42.

²² J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 132.

²³ Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones and Gays* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 205.

²⁴ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 12.

manera is Mario's, and the film is as much about him as about Cuban housing policy. The 'defensive operations' of his ego obstruct access to his unconscious and the recognition of unpleasurable ideas.²² The demolition scenes, therefore, function as a kind of dream-work representing, through displacement and condensation, Mario's worst nightmare: the destruction of his personality by Yolanda's modernizing influence. This psycho-sexual content, in conjunction with the theme of modernity, enables the documentary not only to 'underscore[s] the narrative events', as Kaplan argues, but simultaneously to subvert it as I shall demonstrate.

De cierta manera presents a biographical-historical account of the process of the construction of subjectivity in one man, Mario, who functions as both an individual and a historical type. Realism is enhanced by locating his life-story in a particular time and space (pre-Revolutionary Havana). The process of his maturation, from childhood to adult, entails the acquisition of a sense of self which is inseparable from a gendered identity: masculinity. Mario's self-identity is rooted in his life experiences (those of a streetwise, poorly educated mulatto) and, above all, in the practices and values associated with the Abakuá secret society of which he is a member. The voiceover explains at length the African precedence of the Efik religion and the importance in slave society of its Abakuá cult. Not only are women excluded from the cult but any sign of effeminacy leads to expulsion.²³ In *De cierta manera*, the blame for Cuban machismo is placed squarely with colonial history: on Efik belief which casts woman in the role of archetypal traitor (Sikan, in this case, not Eve), for having revealed the secret of creation, and on the Spanish (Andalusian) honour-shame code which translates into a 'code of violence'. Mario, through no fault of his own, is born into this clearly 'retrogressive', misogynistic culture which he must 'overcome', or demolish, at all costs. Modernization entails the deconstruction of class and gender differences and the reconstruction of recalcitrant cultural attitudes woven into the very fabric of society.

The point is, if Mario does reconstruct himself in order to be a good revolutionary he will, at the same time, demolish his ego and, at a collective level, demolish the Cuban national cultural identity. The articulation of this dilemma positions *De cierta manera* at the cutting edge of postcolonial cinema. As Habermas notes (taking his cue from Walter Benjamin), modernization is Janus-faced; it looks to the past for confirmation of present reality and to the future for erasing the present and the past. 'The anticipation of what is new in the future is realized only through remembering a past that has been suppressed.'²⁴ Nationalism, founded on past tradition, is no less ambiguous, and nationalist modernization (progressive nationalism), strictly speaking, a contradiction in terms. As R. Radhakrishnan argues (with reference to India) 'postcolonial nationalisms have to

choose between being 'themselves' or becoming 'modern nations'. He continues,

The real tragedy is when postcolonial nationalisms internalize rather than problematize the Western blueprint in the name of progress, modernization, industrialization, and internationalism. This process seems difficult to avoid since the immediate history of these nations happens to be Western.²⁵

Mario resists both cultural assimilation to, and castration by, (state) authority. He no longer feels at home in familiar locations. He is, in Kaja Silverman's terminology, about to be 'dislodged from the subject position' of the dominant fiction underpinning Cuban social formation. This fear of castration indicates not only a potential loss of belief in male adequacy but also in the dominant 'national' fiction.²⁶

Interestingly, in her discussion of the 'drastic creative decline' in Cuban documentary films in the 1970s, Ana López specifically mentions Sara Gómez's documentaries (made in the late 1960s and early 1970s) as the precursors (despite 'some crucial differences') of documentaries made twenty years later. These films, López explains, 'are part of what might be called a contemporary *rescate cultural* [cultural salvage] genre' in which the pre-revolutionary past is seen as something that should not be demolished. The films present the 'remnants' of the pre-revolutionary past which are in need of critical re-evaluation due to their great significance to contemporary cultural identity. Recent 1980s documentaries, and here we might include Sara Gómez's film, 'do not attempt to present objective representations of any one thing, person or ideological position'; they recognize the filmmaker's 'own unstable place within the project of signifying a national cultural identity' and they 'explore the dialectic between the social and discursive constitution of the self, knowledge and its mediators'.²⁷

Unlike more conventional narratives or foundational fictions in which woman represents interiority, the home and the nation, in *De cierta manera* the home is represented by a man aptly named Mario. Hence the parallels drawn between his ego and the houses in the process of demolition, the reconstruction of New Man and new housing estates, and the presentation of Mario in the domestic sphere with his parents rather than Yolanda, who is never seen at home. Mario represents the sacred inner sanctum/inner self as much as the outer world; he is the 'signifier of interiority', the true national subject which is inner, traditional, spiritual and 'exiled from the processes of history'.²⁸ The threat to Mario's masculinity is presented as a threat to Cuban (national, popular) cultural identity and, more importantly, to revolutionary culture. He is being asked to query male bonding, to betray his fellow men. As Chanan points out, Mario's forceful rejection of a change in attitudes is spoken to his

25 R. Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Locations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 194.

26 Kaja Silverman, 'Historical trauma and male subjectivity', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 114.

27 Ana López, 'Revolution and dreams: the Cuban documentary today', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 11 (1992), pp. 45–57, 47, 50.

28 Radhakrishnan *Diasporic Meditations*, pp. 189, 193.

friend in the Plaza de la Revolución under the statue of black independence fighter, General Maceo, whose horse is attributed with enormous balls.²⁹ Here Mario exclaims 'men made the Revolution, *coño!*' [cunt]. Conversely, a loss of masculinity represented by the 'emasculated' boxer turned singer, Guillermo Diaz, who since relinquishing his boxing career (brought to an end when he defended his honour by murdering the man who molested his girlfriend) is no model for young men (he is overweight and has a high-pitched voice) or guarantor of a more just society. His song, throughout which Mario and Yolanda smile benignly, is all about the hypocrisy of women.

A sequence of stills is shown in the film to illustrate and confirm the official lesson outlined above (that machismo is embedded in Cuban cultural history and must be overcome). At a referential level they function as documents demonstrating that men have exploited women sexually, regardless of race. In one illustration white *criollos* of European descent buy the sexual favours of black women; in another, a black middle-class man (dressed in a top hat) is seen to approach black women at a window. Yet these same images function to undermine the very ideology they purportedly confirm. The images are of works of art: drawings and paintings depicting colonial Cuba. The product of a rich colonial heritage, each is interesting and aesthetically pleasing in its own right. Together they draw attention from the frame narrative and construct another competing narrative of pleasure and contentment. Similarly, the footage of Abakuá ritual is of compelling ethnographic interest. The question asked implicitly is this: take all this away and what is left? Sexist values are inextricably woven into Cuban cultural identity and popular Cuban culture. What is the alternative: New Soviet style housing estates representing the socialist New Man?

These visual images and skilful editing elsewhere in the film undercut the authoritative voiceovers presenting the official version: statements such as 'Las Yaguas' housing estate was built 'according to a well-researched integration strategy', or that 'after the Revolution in Cuba there are no marginal sectors'. The scene with an upbeat assertion that education is 'our principal weapon' cuts to a closeup of Yolanda, a typical young teacher in a new school, who does not reaffirm this official viewpoint, but exclaims 'I don't like it here'. She does not understand the local people and wants to move out. The fact that neither Mario nor Yolanda settle down happily points to the complex, conflictive process to which there is no solution other than mutual intercommunication.

In *Hasta cierto punto* modernization is not highlighted to the same extent. Apart from Lina's denunciation of the holes in the warehouse roof, the workers' criticism of unproductive working practices, the staging of the final scenes of the play 'Se permuta' (House Exchange) finding fault with post-revolutionary housing policy, and

allusions to a defective chair in Oscar's patio,³⁰ the general tenor of the film confirms the process of successful modernization. Society (the proletariat) is not so sexist in the 1980s; religion and race are not at issue. In classic cinema style the film focuses on one individual, Oscar, who is less aware of his inner contradictions than Mario. As mentioned earlier, there are few distancing devices to interrupt the story; editing is continuous and illusion of the real is created. The film, then, merely confirms the Polity: although the three initial video clips indicate the existence of machismo among dockers, the rest of the clips confirm the Marxist-Leninist view that the proletariat is more critically aware than the bourgeois intellectual, to the extent that the workers can precisely quantify how much their attitudes have changed (one man says he is eighty per cent reformed and might reach eighty-seven per cent). In their debates on working conditions the workers openly challenge the authorities, unlike Oscar who does not confront Arturo. The music, written by Leo Brouwer, is wistfully sentimental. The lyrics of the popular songs are also typically romantic and confirm Oscar's idealization of Lina. In other words, this is sentimental romance cast in the realist genre, a fact underlined by the closing sequence as mentioned previously.

Hasta cierto punto confirms the Polity in yet another way. Lina is presented as the ideal revolutionary woman. She is a single, unmarried mother with a school-age son and clearly has no problems working full time and bringing up her son on her own: she even has time to go to the theatre. However, her experience does not represent that of the vast majority of Cuban working mothers who have complained repeatedly of the 'double shift' (work outside the home during the day and domestic chores in the evenings and weekends). Lina is the ideal subject of production and reproduction. In *De cierta manera* the issue of single mothers is approached very differently. The single mother here is not Yolanda who has a job, is divorced, and has no children; in her own words, she is 'independent'. Yolanda has no understanding of the 'double shift' or of the problems faced by single mothers, represented in the film by the 'testimony' of La Mejicana. La Mejicana, whose partners have abandoned her and her five children, is desperate and poor. The eldest son, Lázaro (like Lina's son, about ten years old), is the problem child in Yolanda's class. Yolanda is appalled to find Lázaro is beaten by his mother and she confronts La Mejicana. La Mejicana tells her story directly to the camera without the voiceover of the documentary sequences. This inclusion of women's autobiographical discourse presented as oral history, established feminist practice in film, adds a further variation to the film style. La Mejicana explains she is away from home from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. travelling to work and then working long hours to feed her family. Incisive editing during her story cuts to scenes of men drinking and playing cards. Yolanda shows little sympathy for Lázaro and his mother and is duly

reprimanded by her superiors. She insists fathers should be made responsible for providing for their children, a point of view ratified, on this occasion, by the documentary footage which lists the special difficulties faced by the children in broken homes. The film thus presents an official view, voiced by Yolanda, but subverts this by showing the experiences of La Mejicana. The key issue is that La Mejicana is doubly exploited: by the men for whom she is a sex object and by the State for whom she is a unit of production.

Neither film presents the traditional nuclear family as a foundational fiction, yet in both films personal relationships are a means of potential liberation. Mario and Yolanda mutually review their preconceptions. Oscar rethinks his ideas after contact with Lina (he wants to rewrite the script of the film he is making with Arturo). Yet there is no liberation for Lina. She learns nothing from Oscar other than the hypocrisy of married men. Her relationship with Oscar brings her difficulties, not freedom. Liberation is not escapism. The filmic discourse of *Hasta cierto punto* is such that it is unable to step out of the limitations of the classic romance genre and offers feeble criticism of the status quo.

Imperfect Cinema could be said to correspond to what John Orr terms, referring to Europe and the USA, neomodern cinema which reappropriated the vanguard cinema of the 1920s (aborted in Hollywood by 'the cultural politics of the market place' between 1959 and 1977). Like Imperfect Cinema, modern/neomodern cinema is self-reflexive, uses a mobile camera, is critical of the bourgeoisie, and stems from national cultures. By the late 1970s and 1980s, Orr argues, Hollywood films had 'commodified most dimensions of neo-montage style' and used it to present morally ambiguous melodramas, often cross-national coproductions, privileging special effects in order to meet the market demands of heterogeneous audiences.³¹ *Hasta cierto punto* cannot be described in quite these terms but, unlike Gómez's film, it is not vanguard cinema and, despite its post-Marxist form, is more dependent on the Polity than hers. Ultimately, its appropriation of dominant cinematic discourse renders the feminist message ambiguous. Imperfect Cinema, on the other hand, is avant-garde cinema which, in Cuba and elsewhere, is entirely relevant today. *De cierta manera*, possibly the only example of feminist Imperfect Cinema in Cuba, examines the impact of rapid modernization on the psychosexual formation of gendered identities at the level of the individual and the collectivity. It challenges traditional patriarchal ideology as well as socialist ideology by consistently breaking down any attempt to provide a pleasurable resolution. In this sense it is exemplary of deconstructive feminist countercinema released from the stranglehold of the Polity and the Economy through Art. Although Gutiérrez Alea's film privileges a critique of sexual politics over class and race politics, and draws connections between material production and morality, *De cierta*

31 John Orr, *Cinema and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 2, 11.

manera goes further. It makes explicit the social construction of masculinity and the problems involved in its deconstruction, and it shows the extent to which sexual politics have been imbricated in all Cuban cultural and social formations throughout history.

Silver sling-backs and Mexican melodrama: *Salón México* and *Danzón*

DOLORES TIERNEY

In his groundbreaking study of melodrama in Mexico, cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis has described how the genesis of the melodramatic was largely dependent on the secularization of society and the separation of Church and State.¹ Monsiváis's thesis seems, therefore, initially to resemble the studies of Thomas Elsaesser and Peter Brooks.² Yet the focus of the Mexican critic's study, the 'Golden Age' of Mexican cinema, spanning roughly from 1935 to 1955, does not neatly parallel the Hollywood cinema of 'sound and fury' of which Brooks and Elsaesser write. This was a time of immense expansion in the Mexican film industry, when it came to enjoy a dominance over Latin America comparable to the hegemony of Hollywood over the English-speaking world. The name 'Golden' clearly refers as well to this cinema's gilded, idealized representations of Mexican life. Yet the Golden Age was also a period when, despite the use of Hollywood structures of production and its stylistic and narrative techniques, Mexican filmmakers were able to forge what is perceived as a distinctly national cinema.³

Existing criticisms of melodrama on both sides of the Anglophonic–Mexican divide have approached the subject from radically opposed positions. Work on Hollywood melodrama has largely followed the Anglo–US criticism centred around feminist and psychoanalytic theories which, despite some of the problems with

1 Carlos Monsiváis, 'Se sufre pero se aprende: el melodrama y las reglas de la falta de límites', in Carlos Bonfil and Carlos Monsiváis (eds), *A través del espejo: El cine mexicano y su público* (Mexico: Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, 1994), pp. 99–224.

2 Peter Brooks, 'The melodramatic imagination', and Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', in Marcia Landy (ed.), *Imitations of Life: a Reader on Film and TV Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), pp. 50–67, 68–91.

3 John King, *Magical Reels: a History of Cinema in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 47–54.

- 4 Initiated by Laura Mulvey and Thomas Elsaesser.
- 5 His publications include *Historia Documental del Cine Mexicano*, currently in its seventeenth volume (Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara/Ediciones Era, 1969). *El cine de Silvia Pinal* (Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1990). *Cineastas de México: Emilio Fernández* (Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1987).
- 6 Ana López, 'The melodrama in Latin America: films, *telenovelas* and the currency of a popular form', in Landy (ed.), *Imitations of Life*, pp. 596–606.
- 7 Ana López argues that this view has been especially common since 'the 60s [when] the "old" Latin American cinema ... has been the "other" against which the "new" [more explicitly and intentionally political] cinemas struggled to define themselves'. López, 'Tears and desire: women and melodrama in the "old" Mexican cinema', in John King, Ana López and Manuel Alvarado (eds), *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London: British Film Institute, 1993), pp. 147–63, 147–8.
- 8 Joanne Hershfield refers to the 'Golden-Age' years as a time when patriarchy was in crisis. In the new, post-Revolution, urban-dwelling Mexican nation, women, working as prostitutes or night-club hostesses, for example, were able to earn more than the men. In the films *Salón México* and *Distinto amanecer/A Different Dawn* (Julio Bracho, 1943), women are the bread-winners. Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema, Mexican Woman 1940–1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 77.
- 9 López, 'Tears and desire', p. 148.
- 10 An excellent example would be Linda Williams's essay, 'Something else besides a mother': *Stella Dallas* and the maternal melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), pp. 299–35.

these approaches, still provide the dominant models for academic writing on this Hollywood genre.⁴ For its part, Mexican criticism of melodrama has not, to date, appropriated psychoanalytic or feminist frameworks. Instead, it has generally favoured the kind of economic and sociohistorical analysis exemplified by the school of writing initiated by the very prolific Emilio García Riera.⁵ This too has left substantial gaps, some of which have begun to be filled by the efforts of Carlos Monsiváis. His work differs from that of the vast majority of Mexican film critics in that he writes about a very broad range of popular cultural forms, including music, song, dance, photography and the press. Monsiváis's work, for me, epitomizes what Latin American film scholar Ana López has argued is necessary in contemporary work on Mexican cinema. It offers further investigation into the cultural differences within signifying systems, and it explores how melodramas are read differently in different cultures and in different *épocas*.⁶ In the past, Golden-Age film directors have been charged with using melodramas like the classic *Salón México* (Emilio Fernández, Mexico, 1949) to forward an ideology of family orthodoxy and national unity within a context of a growing economic and social crisis arising from the failure of many of the ideas of the Mexican Revolution.⁷ Yet this is clearly not the only way in which these films have historically been interpreted or, indeed, in which they could be interpreted now.⁸ As Ana López writes, 'the characterisation of the "old" cinema as ideologically complicit and servile to the interests of the dominant classes, albeit in many ways justified, was too broad, ignoring the subtleties and differences of cinematic practices, their audiences, and this cinema's tremendous popular appeal'.⁹

This work of reevaluating film forms from the past to see how, at different times, they may or may not allow for readings which coincide or conflict with dominant ideologies has been very important in feminist studies of Hollywood melodrama from the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰ While certain elements of these studies may be usefully applied to the field of Mexican Golden-Age melodrama, there exist considerable generic differences between the Hollywood and the Mexican melodrama which risk being overlooked.¹¹ One of these differences will be my principal focus in this article: namely that music is foregrounded to a greater degree in Mexican melodrama than in Hollywood. The *cabaretera* (dance-hall or nightclub) film, an important subgenre of Golden-Age Mexican melodrama, is in fact a hybrid of the melodrama and the musical, and diegetic music is highly important to the atmosphere. As Ana López writes, 'In these and other films the narrative stoppage usually generated by performances was reinvested with emotion, so that melodramatic pathos emerged in the moment of performance itself (through gesture, sentiment, interactions with the audience within the film, or simply musical choice) ... music and song rather than

11 López writes that it is important to be aware 'of the dangers of imposing upon the Latin American cinema critical modes that do not reflect its socio-historical conditions', in 'Tears and desire', p. 149.

12 Ibid., p. 150.

13 François Truffaut, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 30 (1954); Jacques Audibert, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 32 (1954)

14 Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 17–34.

15 Ibid., table 3.1, pp. 20–21; table 3.2, p. 24.

dramatic action propel the narrative'.¹² To date, little detailed study of music and dance in these melodramas exists: only *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s work on the heavy sexuality of Ninón Sevilla's dancing in several of her *cabaretera* roles is really of any note.¹³

In 'Entertainment and utopia', British critic Richard Dyer examines the ways in which song-and-dance numbers in musicals can be seen to function ideologically.¹⁴ He argues that the emotional qualities offered by musicals – abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community – work politically in relation to 'everyday life' by filling a compensatory role: for example 'abundance' compensates for 'actual poverty in society', or 'intensity' makes up for dreariness.¹⁵ Taking these conclusions a step further, Dyer then argues that the only political issues entertainment addresses (or compensates for) are those which it is capable of solving *itself* – ultimately leading to the exclusion of marginal concerns, such as 'class, race and sexual caste', that the musical as a bourgeois form cannot incorporate within its dominant ideology. Dyer's study stems from, and focuses on, popular films produced by Hollywood, such as *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957) and *On the Town* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1949). While I find his arguments extremely suggestive, I would argue that in both classical and contemporary Mexican cinema those marginalized concerns which Dyer articulates are often incorporated into popular forms, particularly song-and-dance numbers. In order to explore these questions, I intend to compare two Mexican melodramas, one from the Golden Age and one from the very recent past, paying particular attention to the role of music and dance. These melodramas, *Salón México* and *Danzón* (María Novaro, 1991), are notable for the way in which both are centred around a particular couple dance form, the very popular Cuban *danzón*. In many ways, *Danzón* is a reworking of the earlier film, and an affectionate tribute to it and to other *cabaretera* films of the Golden-Age period.

In Emilio Fernández's film *Salón México*, the protagonist Mercedes works as a dance-hall hostess (prostitute), to support her younger sister at an exclusive boarding school. In many ways she is a codified representation of a single mother: she takes on a nurturing role and is presented as very maternal towards her sister. Mercedes and Paco (her pimp) win a *danzón* competition, but because he will not share the prize money which she needs to pay her sister's school fees, she steals it from his room at night. Lupe, the neighbourhood policeman, witnesses the crime but protects Mercedes, saving her from a beating by Paco because he is aware of the noble reason for which she took the money and is also in love with her. Mercedes regularly visits her sister at the school and learns that she is to be married to the war-hero son of the headmistress. But she is unable to meet her sister's fiancé as arranged when Paco hides out in her room after a robbery and imprisons her there. Lupe asks Mercedes to

The melodramatic *cabaretera*,
Salón México.
 Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.



marry him and, knowing her sister will be looked after by her new husband, she gives her consent. However, Paco, escaping from prison, comes to Mercedes's room, and threatens to tell her sister what she really does for a living. To protect her sister Mercedes stabs Paco who, as he dies, shoots and kills her.

In María Novaro's film, *Danzón*, the protagonist Julia is a single mother who works as a telephonist in Mexico City. Her only distraction is dancing, which she does a few times a week with her dance partner Carmelo. One day Carmelo fails to show up at the dance hall, and Julia goes to search for him in the port of Veracruz. Here she meets a succession of characters who help her look for Carmelo. She makes friends with the landlady of the boarding house, a prostitute (Colorada) and a couple of transvestites (Suzy and Yadira) who have a stage show, and she has a brief affair with Rubén, a young, handsome, tug-boat man, but does not find Carmelo. She returns to Mexico City happy and refreshed after her holiday. On her return to the dance hall Carmelo appears, and without explanation for his absence they begin dancing, smiling at each other.

Danzón is a homage not just to *Salón México*, but also to other classical Mexican melodramas about fallen women, such as *Aventurera/Adventuress* (Albert Gout, 1949), *Santa* (Antonio Moreno, 1931) and *La mujer del puerto/Woman of the Port* (Arcady Boytler, 1933). The *cabaretera*, the dance-hall film of the 1940s, ostensibly offered symbolic narratives around the new role of Mexican women in the public sphere. The archetypal figures of the *cabaretera* film were defined through the sacrifice of their bodies as sexual objects for men and for their families:¹⁶ in *Salón México*, Mercedes literally gives her life for her sister. In 'Entertainment and utopia', Richard

16 See cf. 4 of Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema: Mexican Woman* pp. 77–105.

Dyer suggests that classical Hollywood cinema offers no room for 'the Other' in its construction of pleasure. It could nevertheless be argued, to a certain extent, that the marginal already exists in the narrative offered by *Salón México*. Although, as a 'fallen woman' Mercedes is excluded from, rather than recuperated by, society, she is largely pardoned for her prostitution and stealing by a narrative which paints her as a heroine, albeit a tragic one.

One further implication of Dyer's argument in 'Entertainment and utopia' is that if a film is to address the concerns of 'the Other' (women, gays, ethnic minorities) it must either seek an alternative to the dominant or classical mode, or adapt the classical form so that room is made for 'the Other'. In practice, the former option has traditionally led to films that are aimed at smaller, 'specialized' audience sectors (usually the group in question) or to experimental cinema. The strategy of the Mexican film *Danzón*, however, seems to be to reappropriate popular forms of entertainment, pleasure and escapism (the *cabaretera*) – precisely those forms dismissed as complicit with a bourgeois value system by the intervening New Cinema movements of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷ In *Danzón*, director María Novaro's *modus operandi* seems to be to acknowledge and tap into the pleasures of this classical, patriarchal cinema, with all of its contradictory drives, rather than simply dismissing it, whilst at the same time reinscribing it with a set of meanings and representations that aim to challenge patriarchal culture. In her film, Novaro incorporates the concerns of these marginal figures, the lower class, the badly paid, the women, giving a narrative voice to prostitutes with children, transvestites, single middle-aged mothers. *Danzón*'s protagonist Julia achieves an autonomy and self-fulfilment that *Salón México*'s Mercedes could never even have wished for. Whereas her 1940s counterpart dies, Julia not only survives but enjoys a rebirth through dance. The problems faced by marginal groups are addressed rather than suppressed in favour of the problems faced by the dominant social groups which, as Dyer points out, are offered 'solutions' by the dominant filmic forms. This is further evident in *Danzón* in the manner in which Novaro very importantly marginalizes dominant ideology within the narrative, making the concerns of middle-class, heterosexual, white men completely peripheral. In her 1990s version of the *cabaretera*, space is established for marginalized groups or ideologies both through the organization of narrative and through the specific use of song and dance.

How can music and dance, as emotive factors within melodrama, function politically, not just in a 'compensatory' role but in a radical one? Dyer argues that the taken-for-granted description of entertainment as 'escape' points to its central thrust: utopianism. Here again the British critic's ideas find a point of correlation with Carlos Monsiváis who has suggested that the realm of sentiment is

17 King, *Magical Reels*, pp. 65–77.

18 Carlos Monsiváis, 'Bolero: a history', *Mexican Postcards*, trans. John Kraniauskas (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 270–318.

19 López, 'Tears and desire', p. 159.

20 Monsiváis, *Mexican Postcards*, p. 312.

21 This is in much the same way as the camerawork seems to represent the socially dominant position (patriarchy) looking in on her, rather than her looking for herself, in contrast to *Danzón's* camerawork as I hope to show later.

22 *Vende caro tu amor, aventurera/da el precio del dolor a tu pasado,/y aquél que de tus labios la miel quiera/que pague con brillantes tu pecado.*

not to be undervalued or dismissed politically.¹⁸ In a history of the *bolero*, one of the most popular song-forms in Mexico, Monsiváis charts its development from a rural love song to an urban form of expression with political resonances intimately linked to melodrama. For example, the *bolero* love songs written and recorded by the singer–composer Agustín Lara, which frequently provided 'the central dramatic impulse propelling the action of many *cabaretera* films',¹⁹ expressed sympathy with marginalized groups, usually prostitutes. Monsiváis writes about the *bolero's* metamorphosis to suggest that 'cultural perception changes, rapture persists'. He continues: 'Song adds psychological credibility to cabaret, . . . collectivities gathered in bars and cafes hear songs that make intimate history a public concern – the autobiography of everyone and no one'.²⁰

The ways in which music may be employed as an ideological device vary greatly across both 'old' and 'new' *cabaretera* films. The music of *Salón México*, for example, never seems to comment on the protagonist Mercedes's predicament or state of mind, nor does it appear to be 'motivated' from her point of view as subjective music. Mercedes never shows any consciousness of her situation. Instead, the music seems to function simply as an 'external' narrative.²¹ Yet in another of the Golden-Age *cabaretera* films, *Aventurera*, music is specifically linked to the subjectivity of the female protagonist. The title song 'Adventuress', written by Agustín Lara and which clearly inspired the film as a whole, is sung in the film by a man (Pedro Vargas) on stage over a long scene in which Elena (Ninón Sevilla), a prostitute in a smart club, ponders the fate that has befallen her, whilst the camera follows her around the room. The *bolero's* lyrics implore: 'Sell your love expensively, adventuress/ Charge for the pain of your past/He who wants honey from your lips/Let him buy your sins with diamonds'.²²

Like the earlier *cabaretera* films, *Danzón* relies heavily on *bolero* songs, as well as on other music from the Golden-Age period to express the emotions of its protagonist. These come to represent not only Julia's nostalgia, and that of the other ageing dancers and *bolero* fans in the film, but also her growing passion for love and for life, with the possibility of a sexual 'fling' with a young *monote* or 'hunk', rather than the sad realization that her chances of happiness have been ruined through prostitution or promiscuity (as with *Aventurera* and *Salón México*). In one scene, the love song, 'Cómo fue' ('How did it happen'), communicates Julia's lust as she spots the young Rubén,²³ her soon-to-be lover running through the rain, his T-shirt soaked: 'Your smile, like a fresh spring/ Watered my life with longing/. . . Maybe it was my impatience/ For waiting so long for you to arrive/. . . I can't explain how it happened/ But I fell in love with you'. The instrumental break which follows these lyrics in the song replaces the dialogue when Rubén approaches Julia; we see them in long shot as she first refuses whatever he is suggesting and

then begins to laugh and acquiesce after which he pulls up a chair and sits down. In this way, *Danzón* exemplifies how music and song help the critical mind look at the 'old' as a site of interesting exchange and cultural value, as a site of political resistance. In another self-conscious redirection of song lyrics, melodies from Mexico's past become part of a transvestite stage show. In a costume reminiscent of Ninón Sevilla's in *Aventurera*, Julia's friend, Suzy the transvestite, mimes to a song written by Lara, 'El Coquero' ('The Coconut Seller') in a seedy bar with pictures of naked women on the walls. These shots of Suzy singing, after an initial straight-on master shot, are established as Julia's point-of-view shots as she enjoys the show. In this way, María Novaro redirects the conventions of the *cabaretera* genre in *Danzón* to emphasize female desire and subjectivity as well as gay male culture. The use of *boleros* and other popular songs is not just about nostalgia for an age of sentimentalism, but also constitutes a feminization of 'patriarchal' love themes, updating the codes of the classical Mexican cinema which, on the whole, did not afford much space to female desire and the feminine point of view.

I would like to turn now to an examination of the function of dance in *Salón México* and *Danzón*. Here, I am drawing upon Richard Dyer's article 'And I seem to find the happiness I seek: heterosexuality and dance in the musical', another work which might usefully complement Carlos Monsiváis's studies of Mexican popular culture. In this article, Dyer examines the formal qualities of couple dances in cinema in relation to the construction of the heterosexual ideal: the 'heavenly feeling' in the Astaire-Rogers films of the 1930s (*Top Hat* [Mark Sandrich, 1935] especially), a number of MGM musicals of the 1940s and 1950s (*On the Town* [Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen, 1949] and others), and several 1980s 'musicals', such as *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977) and *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987).²³ Dyer's interpretation of dance is a useful way of reviewing melodrama of the Golden Age, especially the *cabaretera* genre which foregrounded dance, because, beyond the fact that these films function as musicals (in that their shape, movement and feeling as films are dictated by music), this kind of approach might also help to uncover previously unlocated sites of female subjectivity within a cinema of *machismo*.

From the very beginning of *Danzón* there are strong indications of the primacy of dance in the film's narrative and visual style. This is first signalled by the title which, of course, denotes the popular dance form. During the opening shot, this title appears superimposed over the image of a pair of silver sling-backs. In the rest of the credit sequence, a floor-level camera focuses initially on this woman's feet, her silver sling-backs made to appear huge by the camera's angle and position. A man's white patent shoes then move into the frame to join the woman's, and as they start dancing the

²³ In Helen Thomas (ed.), *Dance, Gender and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 49–65

The dance of restraint and elegance, *Danzón*.
Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.



camera begins to track right along the floor past other pairs of dancing feet, stopping to focus on another couple before moving off again. Showing feet to the exclusion of the rest of the body signals an intense interest in the steps of the dance but also, by showing a woman's feet joined by a pair of male feet, emphasizes the male-female relationships around which the dance is based, much like the heterosexual dances discussed by Dyer. By beginning to track just as the couple start dancing, the camera links itself to their movement and the dynamics of dancing, and once this link is established it continues throughout the film. In one scene Julia's point-of-view shots show ships gliding through Veracruz port with the same tracking movements used to shoot the dance sequences, imbuing the ships with a dance-like grace. However, unlike the Hollywood musical, neither the Golden-Age *cabaretera* nor its modern counterpart are based on the construction of heterosexual happiness ('heaven') or a utopia. The pleasure of dance and music is not that of the escape from, or the transcendence of, worries as compensation for social problems. It is usually a mixed pleasure of suffering and happiness: the pleasure of the dance movement coupled with an awareness of the context under which it is danced. In Monsiváis's work on melodrama this idea is conveyed very well by the title he gives to one of his articles: 'Se sufre pero se aprende: el melodrama y las reglas de la falta de límites' ('One suffers but one learns: melodrama and the rules of breaking the limits').²⁴

The opening sequence of *Danzón* is very similar to a scene from *Salón México* in which we see Mercedes dancing in a *danzón* competition with Paco, her abusive pimp. *Danzón* makes direct textual reference to this film by adopting the same low camera

²⁴ In Bonfil and Monsiváis (eds), *A través del espejo*.

position which prioritizes footwork and, of course, shoes. However, in *Salón México* this camera position is used to a different end, as part of a generic subtext of the *cabaretera* film – one which details the sacrifice of the female body for the greater good of society (and indeed, we do get the impression that Mercedes *suffers* rather than enjoys the dancing). This sacrifice of body can be seen to be expressed through the camera work and the rhythms of the editing around Mercedes, who gives up her body, as a dancer/prostitute, in order to educate her younger sister. When the film cuts to two other couples dancing, the camera *pans* upwards from feet to heads and shoulders so that we get more of a sense of their complete bodies; whereas with Mercedes and Paco the film *cuts* between their heads and shoulders and feet, thus fragmenting their bodies. Mercedes is represented not as a whole, but as a fetishized object for the male gaze. In this film, the camera's concentration on shoes (which appear even sexier in closeup, and are, in a way, her 'tools of the trade') signals the fact that Mercedes is a prostitute. This camera work and editing, coupled with the smoky room and chiaroscuro lighting, creates an erotically charged atmosphere: dance becomes a sublimation of the sexual act itself. In contrast, the dance-hall scenes in *Danzón* use available light to ensure the scenes have no dark, shadowy corners to create that 'older' sense of sin and seediness. In *Danzón*, in a less morally-repressive context where a woman's virtue and honour are not mapped onto notions of nationhood (as with the Golden Age films), dance is no longer primarily a metaphor for sex. In fact, in *Danzón*, it generally seems to represent quite the opposite. The desexualization of the *danzón* is part of the film's thematic in terms of its construction of Julia's independence – her growing ability to define herself independently of sexual relations with men. *Danzón* offers her a way to dance that is not primarily for men's pleasure but, instead, for her own entertainment, her own needs.

It is thus symptomatic of the sexual objectification of women in *Salón México* that the *danzón* is presented within the mise-en-scene as erotically charged, and a metaphor for sex. Through the way it is shot, the environment in which it is placed, and the morally repressive context of which it is a part, the dance in *Salón México* is explicitly sexualized and patriarchal, in the sense of physical male domination and female subordination, exemplified by the way that Mercedes dances when Paco orders her to. In comparison with other Latin American dances, the Cuban *danzón* is, in fact, one of the most obsessively rigid and, consequently, rather understated in its sexuality. Couples do not hold each other close, but slightly apart. They do not clutch each other, but hold each other gently enough only to maintain contact. Latin American dances are often stereotyped as hot, steamy and, most of all, lustful. However, the *danzón* – recently repopularized as a middle-class diversion after the success of Novaro's film – is very 'respectable', and it is perhaps for

this reason that it is one of the least well-known dances outside of the continent. It is a dance of 'restraint and elegance'²⁵ (a restraint to which the camera in *Danzón* often alludes by focusing on one small area, the feet), neither overly showy or flamboyant, nor necessarily suggestive or erotically charged.

In *Danzón*, dance is used to shape and punctuate the narrative. Its obsessive rigidity works with more sentimental strategies to map a classical shape onto a 1990s film. As a dance made up of right angles, squares and harmony, the *danzón* embodies a notion of formal classicism that is commensurate with the concept of the cinema to which it makes reference. The *danzón* at first represents Julia's old fashioned view of the world (men lead and women follow), but it comes to represent her self-awareness and self-liberation. At first Julia is prudish both in looks and in attitude, wearing her hair back and knee length skirts outside of the dance hall, and declining to dance with a handsome admirer because he is younger than her. But when she does begin to become aware of herself as a sexual being, and dresses more glamorously (prompted, paradoxically, by the advice of a man, albeit a transvestite), her shift in behaviour is *not* equated with prostitution, as it is with Mercedes's shoes in *Salón México*.

In a key scene with respect to these issues, Julia teaches Suzy, her transvestite friend, how to dance the *danzón*. Suzy wants to be the 'woman', and at first Julia is reluctant to swap roles because Suzy's height and breadth in comparison to hers will spoil the harmony of the dance. Then she agrees to lead and let Suzy (the man) follow, yet insists the dance must remain elegant (they must not 'bastardize' it). This scene provides a good example of how Julia is 'liberated' through dance. In a subversion of what could be seen as the patriarchal norm of the dance, she adopts the male position. In addition, this scene seems metonymically to represent *Danzón*'s relationship to the classical form, the *cabaretera*. Both Julia and Novaro take a classical form (the *danzón* and the *cabaretera* respectively) and allow into that classical form the concerns of normally marginalized groups. In the case of Julia, she takes the lead and dances with a transvestite, but at the same time as subverting the dance she insists on being faithful to it. Similarly, Novaro is not producing a camp parody of the *cabaretera* genre, but paying a respectful homage. This is symptomatic of the manner in which *Danzón* updates the *cabaretera*, transforming it whilst honouring its form and pleasures. In the same scene, Julia explains to Suzy how the emotion of *danzón* is all indirect and only hinted at. This becomes significant in the film for, against these rules, it is through dance that Julia is sexually direct on her first date with the tug-boat man Rubén, wiggling her hips while he watches, smitten. It is also through dance, at the very end of the film, that Julia finally meets Carmelo's gaze, breaking another of the dance's taboos in a gesture

that suggests equality and complementarity between the two partners. In *Danzón*, then, dance is symbolic of Julia's feelings about her sexuality. Even though it is something which she enjoys, the rigidity and understated sexuality of the dance initially work as a metaphor for her fear of involvement, but then mirror her move to independence as she learns how (respectfully) to 'change the rules'.

The manner in which the dance is represented within the mise-en-scene and the question of whose pleasure it fulfils need some further elaboration. As well as the credit sequence in *Danzón* there are a number of extended dance sequences. Indeed, both *Danzón* and *Salón México* feature showcased dance sequences. In *Salón México*, however, these are offered 'directly' to the audience, unmediated by a particular character's point of view; whilst in *Danzón*, on a number of occasions, the camera significantly spies on dancing couples from Julia's point of view. With specific regard to Mexican cinema, this has other implications. As Monsiváis has said of the Golden-Age films, 'Women were looked at with scorn, affection, veneration or lust but until very recently they were never able to look for themselves'.²⁶ Julia represents a woman's right to look, the leap effected between the classical and the modern film. Thus in *Danzón*, the pleasure in dancing and the pleasure in watching dancing are systematically stripped of their patriarchal imperatives by returning them to their diegetic source: female desire. In this sense, *Salón México* is a typical 'woman's film' of its period, one which, as feminists have argued, inscribes patriarchy's attempt to access (then symbolically control and repress) that female desire which remains one of its 'Others'.²⁷ *Danzón*, however, seems to represent an attempt to 'claim back' female desires, one which has been facilitated by the presence of women directors like Novaro in the industry, and the postfeminist context in which the film was produced.

A similar strategy might also be detected in the manner in which *Danzón* redirects the use of the high-heeled shoe. Indeed, *Danzón* seems quite obsessed with feet and shoes, particularly glamorous silver sling-backs. As we have seen, it is with this shoe motif that *Danzón* makes its intertextual reference to films from the past, including *Salón México*. As a 'dance' movie, of course, this concentration on feet is not so unusual: dance films have long used the fetishization of the feet and other body parts as a means of organizing the mise-en-scene and editing. The high heel has subsequently emerged as a classic fetish object within psychoanalytic textual analyses. This does not mean, however, that the fetishization of feet is inherently patriarchal, and comparison with *Salón México* reveals this. In *Danzón*, the significance of dance as dance (rather than as a codification of sex) is about pleasure. The camera's frequent close attention to the face as well as to shoes connotes Julia's sense of womanhood and the pleasure she experiences whilst dancing, in contrast to Mercedes's suffering of the dance in *Salón*

²⁶ Carlos Monsiváis, 'Mythologies', in Paolo Antonio Paranagua (ed.), *Mexican Cinema*, trans. Ana M. López (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 121.

²⁷ Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

México. Historically, high heels are not the footwear of feminism. With their original, spindly heels, which allowed women only to totter and mince seductively (and uncomfortably) but not really walk, they tended to immobilize in order better to display women as an object for spectacle. Yet the silver sling-backs of *Danzón*'s credit sequence – with their chunky heels, expanded soles and 'retro, glam kudos' – seem to make them a parody of what the high heel once represented. In *Danzón*, Julia does much more than dance in her high-heeled sling-backs; throughout the film she is shown confidently striding around in them. This is reminiscent of certain moments in films directed by Pedro Almodóvar, ones in which the Spanish director reappropriates high heels and subverts their original design for male pleasure by transforming them ironically into a phallic weapon of patriarchy. At one point in his 1988 film *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* / *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, as the pregnant protagonist Pepa struts back and forth aggressively in her high heels, the floor-level camera position, extreme closeup of her feet, and sharp camera movements accentuate the size and force of the high heels. In a similar way, the floor level camerawork in *Danzón* ushers in an image of the woman's space within the text: narratively Julia is centred, not marginalized; her image is spectacularized, but within a feminist context.

Out of some divergent approaches to film melodrama offered by Mexican and Anglophone scholars this essay has begun to examine the visual and other pleasures of song and dance in both some 'old' and some 'new' Mexican melodrama. However, there remains a considerable amount of further work to be done in this area. Given the changing critical contexts in which those working on the cinemas of the past and present no longer feel so much of a need to shy away guiltily from examining the always contradictory politics of pleasure, it seems that we can look forward to much more work in this field which might base itself on some of the insights offered by Monsiváis, López and Dyer.

reports and debates

special report:

The changing geography of Third Cinema

MICHAEL CHANAN

1 This is a revised version of an article entitled 'Le troisième cinéma de Solanas et Getino', *CinémAction*, no. 60 (1991).

2 Robert Stam, 'The Hour of the Furnaces and the two avant-gardes', in Julianne Burton (ed.), *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), p. 253.

In 1968, after two years work, a group of filmmakers in Argentina calling themselves Grupo Cine Liberación, radical in both politics and their approach to cinema, completed a mammoth three-part political film running almost four and a half hours entitled *La hora de los hornos/Hour of the Furnaces*.¹ Constrained by the conditions which followed the military coup of 1966, but bolstered by the growth of organized resistance, the film was shot semi-clandestinely in conjunction with cadres of the Peronist movement (the negative was smuggled out to Italy where the film was finished). In short, as the North American critic Robert Stam has put it, it was a film made 'in the interstices of the system and against the system . . . independent in production, militant in politics, and experimental in language'.²

Setting out with the intention of making a social documentary in the manner established in Argentina ten years earlier by Fernando Birri and the Documentary School of Santa Fe (of which one of the group, Gerardo Vallejo, had been a member), the project underwent an organic transformation as a result of the conditions in which it was made. In particular, its most famous trait – the 'openness' of its text – derived from the experience of the filmmakers in the organization of political debates around the screening of films from Cuba or by filmmakers like Joris Ivens:

We realized that the most important thing was not the film and the information in it so much as the way this information was debated. One of the aims of such films is to provide the occasion for people to find themselves and speak about their own problems. The projection becomes a place where people talk and develop their awareness. We learnt the importance of this space: cinema here becomes humanly useful.³

Accordingly the film was constructed in a highly idiosyncratic manner. Prompted by intertitles posing questions like 'Why did Perón fall without a struggle? Should he have armed the people?', it was designed to be stopped in the projector to allow for discussion and debate – designed, in other words, to disrupt the normal passive relationship of the spectator to the screen.

The end product amounts to a militant poetic epic tapestry, weaving together disparate styles and materials ranging from didacticism to operatic stylization, direct filming to the techniques of advertising, and incorporating photographs, newsreel, testimonial footage and film clips – from avant garde and mainstream, fiction and documentary. But the filmmakers described it as a 'film act', rather than a film in the conventional sense (which indeed it was not): 'an unfinished work, open in order to incorporate dialogue and for the meeting of revolutionary wills'.⁴

Stam has pointed out the paradox which resulted: where 'openness' in art is usually understood in terms of plurisignification, polysemy, a plurality of equally legitimate readings offered to the contemplation of the receiver, *Hour of the Furnaces* 'is not open in this sense: its messages are stridently unequivocal'.⁵ The openness of the film lies elsewhere: in the *political* relationship between the film and the viewer – at least, in the clandestine circumstances in which the film was necessarily viewed in Argentina itself in the years before 1973, when the Peronists won a resounding electoral victory, the political conditions of the country were transformed, and a version of the film was put on commercial release. Those clandestine audiences were not insignificant: with some fifty prints in circulation, the film makers estimated 100,000 viewers had seen it over the five years in which the film led its hidden life.⁶

Following the completion of the film, two members of the group, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, wrote a manifesto based on the experience entitled *Hacia un tercer cine/Towards a Third Cinema*.⁷ Subtitled 'Notes and experiences on the development of a cinema of liberation in the Third World', there is a doubtless deliberate ambiguity in the term 'Third Cinema' which requires explication. The wordplay comes from the analogy with the term 'Third World', meaning the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa

3 Table Ronde avec Fernando Solanas et al., 'Cinéma d'auteur ou cinéma d'intervention?', *CinémAction*, no. 1 (1978), p. 60.

4 Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, *Cine, cultura y descolonización* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1973), p. 10, quoted in Ana López, 'Argentina, 1955–1976: the film industry and its margins', in John King and Nissa Torrents (eds), *The Garden of Forking Paths: Argentine Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 67.

5 Stam, *The Hour of the Furnaces*, pp. 251–66.

6 *CinémAction*, no. 1, p. 61.

7 The essay first appeared in the journal *Tricontinental*, published in Paris in October 1969, and has been republished several times since, in different languages and in different versions, some abbreviated. For the purposes of the present article I have used the version published in Michael Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-Five Years of the New Latin American Cinema* (London: British Film Institute/Channel Four, 1983).

8 For a more detailed account, see Roger Scruton, 'Three World Theory', in *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: Pan Books, 1983).

9 Solanas and Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema', in Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-Five Years*, p. 17.

10 Ibid., p. 17. This slightly begs the question of which world Japan belongs to.

11 Ibid., pp. 22–3 (translation revised).

and Latin America. This term had its origins at the Bandung Conference of 1955, the founding conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, when China promulgated the theory of the three worlds. The First World consisted in the advanced capitalist countries of the West, including North America and Australasia; the Second World comprised the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe; the countries of the remaining continents were thus the Third World, to which China declared its allegiance.⁸ On the one hand, therefore, the term corresponds to what Solanas and Getino referred to as 'a new historical situation': 'ten years of the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese struggle, and the development of a world-wide liberation movement whose moving force is to be found in the third world countries'.⁹ On the other hand, Third Cinema is not restricted to the Third World, even in the original conception of the idea, for in order to illustrate what they meant, they immediately cited examples which come from the First World, namely, 'Newsreel, a US New Left film group, the cinegiornali of the Italian student movement, the films made by the *Etats Généraux du Cinéma Français* and those of the British and Japanese student movements'.¹⁰ A few paragraphs later, they add the experiments carried out by Chris Marker in France when he provided groups of workers with 8mm cameras and basic instruction in their use.

The explanation of this apparent contradiction lies in their argument that the restitution of the real place and meaning of the most diverse phenomena, through experimental films which challenge orthodox representation and establish a new relation with the audience, is eminently subversive both in the neocolonial situation to be found in the countries of the Third World, and in the consumer societies of the First World. They might have added, but did not, in the Second World too. In whichever world, 'every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or penetrates the truth of a situation is something more than a film image or purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the system finds indigestible'.¹¹ Notice that 'experimental' here means something a little different from its traditional use in the context of, say, underground or avant-garde film. The Argentinians suggest a position in which, to fulfil the criteria of Third Cinema, there can be nothing in political terms which is tentative or hypothetical about the content or signification of the images concerned; whereas the avant-garde or underground notion of experimentalism defends the notion of a space which is untouched by these considerations (without thereby becoming reactionary). The idea of Third Cinema, in which the camera is often equated, albeit somewhat rhetorically, to the gun, restores to the term 'avant-garde' something of its original meaning which, as Baudelaire once remarked, was probably due to the French predilection for military metaphors.

Geographical confusions dissolve when the two Argentinians

explain what they mean by First and Second Cinema, which correspond not to the First and Second Worlds but constitute a virtual geography of their own. First Cinema is the model imposed by the US film industry, the Hollywood movie – whose domination is such that even the ‘monumental’ films, like Bondarchuk’s *War and Peace* (USSR, 1967), which had begun to appear in Second World countries, submit to the same propositions. Even when they adopt only the language of the US model, and not its themes, this still corresponds to an ideology which posits a particular relationship between film and spectator, where cinema is conceived as pure spectacle. This kind of film – made for exhibition in large theatres, with a standardized duration (feature-length or blockbuster) and hermetic forms that are born and die on the screen – is not only designed to satisfy the commercial interests of the production companies, it also leads to the absorption of forms which necessarily imply a bourgeois *Weltanschauung* inherited from the nineteenth century, in which the capacity of the subject to participate in making history is denied to all except the heroic and exceptional individual, and history is present only as an external force and an object of contemplation.

Moreover, US cinema not only imposes its models of form and language, but also industrial, commercial and technical structures which include the festivals, magazines and even film schools which perpetuate its values. Here the Argentinians speak from their own perspective as Third-World filmmakers. This institutional structure, they explain, guarantees the hegemony of the films made by the imperialist countries, because the film industries of dependent countries like Argentina are too flimsy and underfinanced to compete effectively, even in their own markets.

The first serious alternative to arise in these countries was the kind of film subsequently known as auteur cinema, art cinema or, in a later phase, new-wave cinema. However, although the comparison suggests itself immediately, Solanas and Getino refrain from identifying the model for this Second Cinema as European, which would be inaccurate both historically and conceptually; I shall return to this below. This alternative, they say, represented an evident advance in terms of the freedom of filmmakers in a country like Argentina to express themselves outside the standardized form and language of the regular commercial movie, with the consequence that the directors involved – they mention Del Carril, Torre Nillson, Ayala, Feldman, Murua, Kohon, Khun, Birri – constituted at a certain moment the vanguard of Argentinian cinema. Indeed, given the cultural hunger which these films started to satisfy, this Second Cinema began to produce its own structures, its own patterns of distribution and exhibition, its own ideologies, critics and reviews. But it also generated, they say, a misplaced ambition to develop a parallel film industry to compete with First Cinema, and this could

only lead to its own institutionalization, within the system, which was more than ready to use Second Cinema to demonstrate the democratic plurality of its cultural milieu. In the process, however, the vanguard was defused and became a cinema made by and for the limited social groups characteristic of what the Argentinians call the dilettante elite. These groups were politically reformist – for example in opposing censorship – but incapable of achieving any profound change. They were especially impotent in the face of the kind of repression unleashed by the victory of reactionary, proto-fascist forces.

A real alternative in this situation was only possible, they said, if one of two requirements were fulfilled: 'either to make films that the system could not assimilate because they are foreign to its needs, or to make films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the system'.¹² The latter – as they specified in 1979 at the Latin American Film-makers Conference at Viña del Mar in Chile, the year before the election of Allende – constituted militant cinema proper, an internal category of Third Cinema. Militant cinema, said Solanas and Getino, or guerrilla film-making, as they called it, was a collective endeavour which opposed itself not only to First Cinema but also to the prevailing Second Cinema notion of the auteur film. In order to accomplish their task, the film crew needed to operate with a radical conception not only of the content of the film but also of the production process, including the team's internal relations, the role of the producer or director, and of individual skills. For example, 'every member of the group should be familiar, at least in a general way, with the equipment used, and must be prepared to replace each other in any phase of production. The myth of the irreplaceable technician must be exploded.'¹³

Despite the rhetoric about the camera as a gun that can shoot twenty-four frames a second, and the projector as weapon of images, this conception of militant cinema was not entirely voluntaristic. For one thing, explaining why guerrilla filmmaking had not been previously possible, Solanas and Getino mentioned the technical advances in film gear which occurred at the beginning of the 1960s, consisting of the introduction of lightweight hand-held cameras and tape-recorders, fast film stock that could be shot in available light, and associated equipment (the same factors that were responsible for the appearance of the movement known in France as *cinéma vérité*, and in the USA as 'direct cinema', whose practitioners were also opposed, at least to start with, to established forms). For another thing, as Getino pointed out some years later, the original manifesto was not a formulaic speculation but the product of a concrete experience: 'It is difficult to imagine the subsequent international exposure of these theories had the film [*Hour of the Furnaces*] not existed. It was only through the existence of the film that we were able to refute the opposition of critics to our theories.'¹⁴

12 Ibid., p. 21 (translation revised).

13 Ibid., p. 24 (translation revised).

14 Octavio Getino, 'Some notes on the concept of a "Third Cinema"', excerpted from *Notas sobre cine argentino y latinoamericano* (Mexico: Edimédios, 1984), in Tim Barnard (ed.), *Argentine Cinema* (Toronto: Nightwood Editions, 1986), p. 102.

The clarification proposed at Viña del Mar was necessary not only because of certain ambiguities in the original formulation, but also because of the discovery that others were thinking along similar lines. In Cuba, for example, Julio García Espinosa had written his own manifesto, also based on his filmmaking experiences, under the title *Por un cine imperfecto/For an Imperfect Cinema*. Both the context and the objectives were different – it was intended in the first place as a warning against the technical perfection which, after ten years of practice by the revolutionary film institute ICAIC, now began to lie within the reach of Cuban filmmakers. But certain aspects of García Espinosa's thesis were directly comparable, including his argument that any attempt to match the 'perfection' of the commercial movie of the metropolis was mistaken, and contradicted the endeavour implicit in a revolutionary cinema, because the beautifully controlled surface of commercial cinema was a way of lulling the audience into passive consumption. (Also, a film industry in a Third-World country could hardly afford such luxurious ambitions.) Clearly there is a similar evaluation here of what Solanas and Getino call First Cinema. Furthermore, there is a certain homology between the two manifestos, not only when the Argentinians write that 'The effectiveness of the best films of militant cinema show that social sectors regarded as backward (by dominant ideology) are perfectly capable of grasping the precise meaning of a visual metaphor, a montage effect, or some linguistic experiment as long as it relates to a determinate idea', but also when they continue that 'revolutionary cinema is not fundamentally one which passively illustrates or documents or registers a situation, rather it attempts to make an intervention which impels a response'¹⁵ – in other words, it promotes the active involvement and subsequent political participation of the viewer.

¹⁵ Solanas and Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-Five Years*, p. 23 (translation revised).

In certain respects, however, the Cuban manifesto was less restrictive and more open about the type and range of films which would conform to its criteria, for it clearly includes films which Solanas and Getino place in the Second Cinema category, such as the work of Fernando Birri, or much of Brazilian *Cinema Novo*. In fact, there was a certain slippage in the Argentinian manifesto between the categories of Second and Third Cinema. As long as *Hour of the Furnaces* itself was taken as the very model of Third Cinema, rather than an exemplar of one of its options, Second Cinema could be taken to include certain attempts at an alternative type of cinema which from a more comprehensive perspective are more correctly seen as alternate models of Third Cinema. Getino recognized this ten years later when he wrote that 'We didn't fully realize at the time the extent to which the Argentinian reality of the late 60s defined the content and form of our work and its parallel theoretical elaboration'.¹⁶ This is connected with a second problem. At one point the Argentinian manifesto makes the claim that the

¹⁶ Barnard (ed.), *Argentine Cinema*, p. 101.

clearly differentiated national characteristics typical of early cinema have since disappeared. This is a highly tendentious assertion – especially with regard to Second Cinema – which is subsequently contradicted in the manifesto itself, at any rate by implication, when it says that while guerrilla cinema did not yet have enough experience to lay down general standards, ‘what experience there is has shown, above all, the ability to make use of the concrete situation of each country’. For this ‘concrete situation’ necessarily includes the individual susceptibilities of different national cultures, which in turn implies that even an oppositional cinema is likely to want to cultivate national cultural traditions.

Both Solanas and Getino later revised their positions to take account of this. Getino effectively criticized their earlier formulation when he continued, in his later article, by observing that the value of a theory such as theirs is always dependent on the terrain in which the praxis is carried out, and any attempt to offer universal prescriptions ‘would be erroneous without consideration of the national context at its root’.¹⁷ Solanas admitted something similar in 1978 when he commented that ‘Third Cinema is also aligned with the national culture’, adding that ‘By national culture we mean that of the ensemble of the popular classes’.¹⁸ At the same time, Solanas modified the original definitions of the three types of cinema in order to correct two misinterpretations of the thesis. If the three types are summarized as

- (i) large-scale production, big budget;
- (ii) independent production and auteur cinema;
- (iii) films made by collectives of militants;

then the first misinterpretation consists in taking every big budget movie automatically as First Cinema, every auteur film as Second Cinema, and every collective film as Third Cinema; while the second consists in classifying First Cinema as the big spectacle, Second Cinema as intimate or intellectual, and Third Cinema as political. The real state of affairs was different: a question of political and ideological function, not of purely filmic categories; in other words, it was a matter of the interests to which the films answer. First Cinema responds to the interests of transnational monopoly capital, be it movie as spectacle, auteur cinema, or film as information; and Solanas is undoubtedly correct when he adds that even the scientific documentary is susceptible to the aspirations of big capital. Second Cinema, on the other hand, expresses the aspirations of the middle layers, the *petit bourgeoisie*. Consequently Second Cinema is often nihilist, pessimist, mystifactory. Here too, all categories of films may be found, including the political, although ‘In neocolonial and dependent countries, the middle sectors are generally aligned with the thinking of the metropolis’. Third Cinema, however, ‘is the expression of a new culture and of changes in

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁸ *CinémAction*, no. 1, p. 66.

society. In a general way, third cinema renders account of reality and history.'

Again, all types of film are possible:

What determines Third Cinema is the conception of the world, and not the genre or an explicitly political approach. Any story, any subject can be taken up by Third Cinema. In the dependent countries, Third Cinema is a cinema of decolonization, which expresses the will to national liberation, anti-mythic, anti-racist, anti-bourgeois, and popular.¹⁹

19 Ibid.

Even this later reformulation of the thesis retains some of the more idealist and voluntaristic aspects of the original; but this is to be expected, and not necessarily critical. Meanwhile, as the concept was taken up more widely, connections were made with parallel movements not only elsewhere in Latin America but other continents too. An anthology which appeared in Mexico in 1972, for example, reprinted the original manifesto alongside writings and interviews covering developments in Mexico itself, in Uruguay (by Mario Handler), Brazil (Glauber Rocha), Colombia (Carlos Alvarez), Bolivia (Jorge Sanjinés) and Chile (Miguel Littín), as well as an interview with the Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene, a collective statement from Vietnam, and an encounter between Solanas and Godard.²⁰ Similar stirrings had begun in other parts of the world, especially the Arab world, where the first manifestos appeared in 1967–8 in Cairo and Morocco; and at the end of 1973, a General Assembly of Third-World filmmakers was held in Algeria, to consider the role of film in the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism and the problems of international cooperation. The Committees appointed to report on these questions included representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Colombia, Republic of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Senegal, Congo, Mali, Tunisia, Palestine and Mauritania, with observers from Britain, France, Sweden and Italy. The presence of these observers confirms that Solanas and Getino were not mistaken to include certain sectors within the First World in their account of Third Cinema – on condition, of course, that these sectors did not attempt to exercise any kind of political or ideological hegemony.

By now, it was becoming clear that another aspect mentioned by Solanas and Getino was at play, the question of the possible 'transnational' function of Third Cinema, so to speak. 'Testimony about a national reality', they had written, can be 'an inestimable means of dialogue and knowledge on a global scale. No internationalist form of struggle can be carried out successfully without a mutual exchange of experiences between peoples, if peoples cannot manage to break out of the Balkanization which

20 See Alberto Hijar (ed.), *Hacia un tercer cine. Cuadernos de Cine*, no. 20 (Mexico: UNAM, 1972).

²¹ Solanas and Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema', in Chanen (ed.), *Twenty-Five Years*, p. 23 (translation revised).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²³ *CinémAction*, no. 1.

imperialism strives to maintain. . .²¹ Here, however, Solanas and Getino were not being idealist: they were perfectly aware that the reading of a film depended upon the conditions of its reception, and these were vastly different in the First and Third Worlds: 'A cinema which in the consumer society does not attain the level of the reality in which it moves can play a stimulating role in an underdeveloped country, just as a revolutionary cinema in the neo-colonial situation will not necessarily be revolutionary if it is mechanically taken to the metropolitan country'.²² In 1978 Solanas cited as an example of the former, the reception of Monicelli's *Les Camarades (I Compagni/The Organizer)* [Italy, 1963]) in Argentina.²³ They were also aware that the system was perfectly capable of absorbing the most dangerous impulses, that virulence, nonconformism, plain rebelliousness and discontent can easily be turned into products on the capitalist market, into consumer goods. Nevertheless, they were prepared to put their faith in the sheer power of the medium. A film on the Venezuelan guerrillas, they maintained, would say more to a European public than twenty explanatory pamphlets, especially in a situation where Third-World struggles were increasingly related to those unfolding in the metropolitan countries, as in those years they seemed to be.

If this was not idealistic, it was still somewhat optimistic. It was not just a question of the state of ignorance of First-World audiences – even sympathetic ones – about Third-World conditions and struggles, compounded by the neglect and disinformation of the dominant media, then as now. There were also wide differences in aesthetic and cultural susceptibilities which began to emerge as the circulation of Third-World films in Europe and the USA began to improve; principally, just as Solanas and Getino predicted, through the 16mm film circuits. These differences were especially pertinent in the USA, with its large Latino communities and growing numbers of immigrants from other parts of the Third World; and it is no accident that an Ethiopian scholar, Teshome Gabriel, who taught film studies at the University of California in Los Angeles, turned his attention to the study of Third Cinema in the late 1970s, at a time when the Third World began to make its presence felt in the USA from within, and a new Chicano cinema was first appearing.

There are two main thrusts in Gabriel's work, one theoretical, one critical. With his concern to interrogate Third-World cinema on its own ground, his theoretical project is the reinterpretation of Third Cinema in terms of the genealogy of Third-World culture proposed by Frantz Fanon in his seminal book *The Wretched of the Earth*.²⁴ Fanon identifies three stages in the cultural development of the colonized people, for which Gabriel finds homologies within cinema. Gabriel first draws attention to the comparison in his book, *Third Cinema in the Third World*,²⁵ and then develops it in a subsequent

²⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1964).

²⁵ Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: the Aesthetics of Liberation*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982).

essay, 'Towards a critical theory of Third-World films'.²⁶ My discussion below draws mainly on the latter.

While Gabriel downplays the comparison which can be drawn between Fanon's three phases and the concepts of First, Second and Third Cinema proposed by Solanas and Getino, nevertheless the degree to which the one can be related to the other is quite remarkable, and gives a significant reading of the development of film culture in countries in all Third-World continents. There is another very interesting homology to be found in a work by the Peruvian Marxist, José Carlos Mariátegui, his *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana/Seven Essays of Interpretation of Peruvian Reality* of 1928, which critiques the orthodox Marxist periodization of art on the basis of the history of class struggle in Europe on the grounds that this is hardly appropriate to a continent like Latin America. For Mariátegui, instead of the feudal, the aristocratic and the bourgeois, a country like Peru experiences the colonial, the cosmopolitan and the national. In the first of these periods, the literature of the country is not that of its own people, but of the conquistador, an already evolved literature transplanted into the colony, where it usually continues to exert an influence beyond the overthrow of the colonial power. During the second period, which is ushered in by the establishment of the independent republic, elements from different foreign literatures are assimilated simultaneously, and the unique cultural hold of the original colonial power is broken. Finally, in the third period, which only properly arrives with economic as well as political independence, a people 'achieves a well-developed expression of its own personality and its own sentiments'.²⁷ Obviously this is not a scheme which can be directly applied even in general terms to countries as diverse as Argentina, Egypt or India, which each have different histories of colonial domination. But cinema, which belongs to the twentieth century and employs a technology invented in the metropolis, produces a much more similar situation in all continents.

The first phase everywhere is that of the uncritical assimilation of the product of the dominant culture, marked by dependency on the Hollywood model, submission to its values, concepts and practices. This does not necessarily mean direct imitation of Hollywood genres, so much as the elaboration of new genres appropriate to the national realities concerned, like the Mexican *ranchera* or the Indian 'Bollywood' musical. These cinemas are usually only sustainable in the larger countries with sizeable internal markets (although subsequent examples like the Hong Kong film industry depend on the exploitation of a niche within the international market). The second phase is the indigenist, or remembrance phase, marked by nostalgia for a legendary or folkloric past, which thus produces a break with first cinema primarily in terms of themes and subjects. National Third-World cinemas which have entered this phase may

27 José Carlos Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (Casa de las Americas, 1975), p. 21.

28 Solanas and Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-Five Years*, p. 20 (translation revised).

thus begin to promote the process of decolonization, but without any real challenge, at least initially, to the orthodox film language of First Cinema in which audiences have grown up. This phase provides a different reading of Second Cinema, especially given that Gabriel cites the example of early films by Rocha (*Barravento* [Brazil, 1961]) and Sembene (*Mandabi* [Senegal, 1968]). There are also variants, which pick out themes that are not exactly folkloric but exoticist and exploitative. Babenco's *Pixote* (Brazil, 1980) is a particularly notorious example. The third phase, in which the aims of decolonization, both cultural and politico-economic, become primary, can be called the combative. This is Third Cinema proper. Here, of course, Gabriel includes the example of Solanas and Getino who, after all, adopt Fanon's criterion themselves when they declare that in the service of liberation, aesthetics is dissolved into social life – 'because only in this way, as Fanon would say, can decolonization become possible, and culture, cinema and beauty . . . become our culture, our cinema, our beauty'.²⁸ However, Solanas and Getino are for Gabriel only one example; in general he tends towards the broader conceptualization of García Espinosa's concept of Imperfect Cinema, and cites other examples of films which the Argentinians would originally have placed in the Second Cinema category, if only because they still testify to the qualities of individual authorship. This, of course, is one of the reasons why the original definition of Third Cinema, with its emphasis on collective authorship, needed revision, or at least clarification. It is necessary to allow for the kind of film – the outstanding example is the work of Sanjinés – which in stylistic terms retains all the marks of individual authorship, but in the process of its creation incorporates the values of the collectivity within which it is made. Indeed it is possible to argue that this is also the condition of much African cinema, and clearly applies to directors like Ousmane Sembene, Souleyman Cissé and many others.

This, in turn, exemplifies a tension which reflects back on the whole theoretical endeavour. Unless these categories – whichever set we use – are comprehended dialectically, their application will inevitably be mechanical and sterile. Gabriel is keenly aware that the whole approach tends towards schematicism, and he therefore emphasizes that there are intermediate positions, 'grey areas', between each phase. Not only that, but a film which occupies such a grey area may face in either direction; indeed, it may be contradictory, and face in both directions at once (even deliberately – the Cuban film *Lucía* by Humberto Solás [1968] is a case in point). Only a dialectical understanding allows for this. At the same time, says Gabriel, it demonstrates precisely the fact that the idea of Third Cinema is not a set of discrete products but a *process of becoming*.

There is no space here to deal with the critical thrust of Gabriel's work. Suffice it to say that he demonstrates considerable critical acumen, and an admirable methodology. In his book on the

aesthetics of liberation, for example, he not only surveys some of the major themes of third cinema, but adopts a comparative method for examining style and ideology, setting against each other First and Third Cinema films on the same subject, or the work of a European director against that of a director from the Third World. In the essay 'Towards a critical theory of Third-World films', he advances a set of interlocking components of critical theory which give him real purchase on crucial topics like the radically different representation of space and time in a cinema based not on literary culture, as in the First World, but on the oral cultures of the Third-World populace. Gabriel himself explains the importance of this critical work when he remarks that in the same way there is a history of unequal economic exchange between North and South, there is also unequal symbolic exchange. The difficulty which radical Third-World films present to western interpretation is at least twofold: the result of the film's resistance to the dominant conventions of metropolitan cinema in its own territory, and the loss by First-World viewers of their normal privileged position as the decoder and ultimate arbiter of meaning.

Critical work like Gabriel's is essential in the face of the growing confusion of signs that now besets us. Without entering into a debate about postmodernism, and the way that images are now produced, recycled, received and then recycled again, it is enough to point to the advances over the last decade in video technology. These advances have not only served to expand and accelerate the circulation of visual materials; in the same way that Third Cinema (as Solanas and Getino observed) was in many ways a by-product of the development of 16mm film at the beginning of the 1960s, the advances in video in the 1980s have expanded the possibilities for all sorts of 'guerrilla' filmmaking. Back in 1981, I was able to use a modest commission (£5000) from a West German television station to go and shoot a 16mm documentary on the guerrilla forces in El Salvador, but only because collaboration with both the FMLN and a militant film collective back in Britain enabled us to minimize the costs. Five years later, it was possible for us to produce a solidarity video on Chile with even less money, in less time and without even going there, because Chilean filmmakers were able to supply a ready-edited video for incorporation into a project produced in London.

Developments in video technology are intimately connected with the expansion of television broadcasting and especially the development of cable and satellite transmission. Between the means of delivery and the means of production the relationship is complex and full of tensions, but even in the USA, the heartland of First Cinema, and what we might call, by extension, 'First Television', this process creates new opportunities for activities we could

29 See Michael Chanan, 'Playing the access card', *New Socialist*, no. 50 (June 1987), p. 45.

similarly call 'Third Television'. I am referring here to the provision of access channels on the cable networks, which activists have been able to use in order to transmit not only their own independent programmes, but also videos collected from Third-World countries, especially Latin America. Indeed one of these groups, Paper Tiger Television based in New York, was able to organize the distribution of compilation tapes by satellite, for retransmission by access groups across the country.²⁹

During the Gulf War, Paper Tiger produced a compilation video of coverage of anti-war demonstrations by different access television groups across the country, which was shown on Channel Four in Britain. In Britain, where cable and satellite have been much slower to develop, the introduction of Channel Four in the early 1980s, with a remit to produce minority-interest programmes, provided new opportunities not only for the broadcast of films and videos from the Third World, but also for the development of new strands of independent production at home. This included a number of collective workshops which had grown up during the 1970s, which were formally recognized in the Workshop Declaration signed by both Channel Four and the ACTT (Association of Film and Television Technicians, now known, since the merger of several of the entertainments unions, as BECTU). The collective practices of these workshops correspond in great measure to the production strategies proposed by Solanas and Getino for Third Cinema. Importantly, they included Black and Asian film and video collectives, who were thus able to present for the first time on British television programmes authored by British Third-World minorities.

The comparison is hardly so simple, of course, for reasons of both theory and praxis. Producing work for a public corporation in a (more or less) liberal democracy with the remit to provide certain spaces for it is not the same as militant filmmaking within a populist or military dictatorship destined to be viewed in marginal spaces; nor, if this comparison seems dated, is it the same as videomaking by the indigenous peoples of Northern Brazil, for distribution in alternative circuits, which is not clandestine but still part of a life-and-death struggle. The new configuration which came about with Channel Four in this country's independent film culture was addressed by a conference at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1986 on the theme of Third Cinema. Here it became clear that the situation was replete with deep contradictions. In the 1970s, the Left was still strong, vociferous and demonstrative. New initiatives were launched across the field of cultural politics, drawing on the lessons to be learnt, for example, from Chilean refugees and the revolution in Portugal, both of which provided powerful instruction about the media, and helped to inform the positions which were recognized in the Workshop Declaration. The paradox of Channel Four – doubtless

predictable from the perspective of Third Cinema – was that official recognition threatened to institutionalize an oppositional film movement which was one of the strongest in Europe. It forced the new programme makers into corners, raising expectations at the same time as imposing new conditions of competition over funds and air space. Moreover, the initial efforts of the new programme makers often betrayed the difficulties of adapting to what was, even if the ratings were relatively negligible, a mass audience, whose anonymity demanded different strategies from those appropriate to the direct encounter with an audience at a small, politically motivated meeting. And of course, overshadowing all this activity was the electoral defeat of the established Left, and the consequent offensive of the new Tory Government, soon bolstered by the jingoism of the South Atlantic War. The result was fragmentation and demoralization.

The Edinburgh Conference brought out all the nerviness of this situation, which quickly polarized the participants, including speakers who came from abroad. David Will, who wrote a lengthy report on the event for the journal *Framework*,³⁰ detected a strong opposition between pluralist positions on the one hand, and populist tendencies on the other, which he roundly criticized. He also reported a split between those he called Afro-American populists, and Asian speakers who appealed strongly to western ideas. This account provoked an extremely irate response from a black American participant, Clyde Taylor from New York, who objected to being labelled as a populist simply because he had argued that it was necessary to interrogate the western concept of aesthetics, as Nietzsche and Foucault had, and to recognize the determination of specific historical experiences and cultural differences. 'The suppression of my opposition to Western aesthetics makes me out to be a different kind of barbarian than I am willing to admit', he wrote in reply. 'My quarrel is not with "art" nor with the theoretical assumptions behind it . . . but with the pre-emptive European metatheorising that has been placed on these activities.'³¹

Will also identified a third and much more pertinent area of discussion, namely the two sessions directly concerned with 'Third Cinema in the Black British Context'. Here the debate was focused on the question of the 'community' which supposedly made up the audience which these filmmakers addressed, including their response to the exhortations frequently directed at them not to produce negative images of this community. The British Asian filmmaker H. O. Nazareth spoke directly to this question in a paper which considered the objections made by members of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities to films like *My Beautiful Launderette*, or the television drama series *King of the Ghetto*. These, in the terms proposed by Solanas and Getino, are successful examples of Second Cinema and its counterpart, Second Television; they use a conventional narrative language to explore themes which, especially

30 David Will, 'Edinburgh Film Festival, 1986', *Framework*, nos 32/33 (1986).

31 Clyde Taylor, 'Eurocentrics vs new thought at Edinburgh', *Framework*, no. 34 (1987), pp. 141–2. I can only declare a certain sympathy with Taylor's arguments, even though he perhaps overstates the case.

32 Will, 'Edinburgh Film Festival, 1986', p. 206.

33 Taylor, 'Eurocentric vs new thought', 1987, p. 144.

in the case of the former, are decidedly risqué. Nazareth argued that the Afro-Caribbean or Asian filmmaker should not for a moment contemplate compliance with such objections, which were patronizing and protectionist, and could only lead to 'sentimental impoverishment' of the media.³²

But does such a notion of 'community' have any real meaning? Taylor criticizes Will's report for Eurocentric anxiety about the question, since 'connectedness to communities struggling against oppression is an essential characteristic of Third Cinema and its symbiosis with the third world'.³³ However, it is exactly the nature and quality of this symbiosis which becomes the problem, especially when trying to achieve Third Cinema from within the First World. There is no question, from the gist of what he says, that he believes this is perfectly possible. The example he mentions is Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (Italy, 1966).

However, I suspect that Taylor's bewilderment over the proceedings at Edinburgh, which was shared by other participants from North America, both black and white, reflects a crucial difference between British and North American political cultures. In the USA, the weakness of national leftist traditions corresponds to a much greater sense of community on the local level. Doubtless, given the sheer size of the country, this is not so surprising. In Britain, a much smaller country, national traditions of left political culture are both much stronger and more centralized. Even though they long ago became ideologically compromised and diluted, the result is a certain fear of the divisiveness of appeals to the rights of different communities. For immigrant peoples, the assertion of community becomes a political necessity, and rewards the cultural activist who is able to mobilize it. Unfortunately, this produces anxiety in the white native, who is suffering from problems like the breakup of communities by postwar urban redevelopment and increasing social disintegration. This rebounds on the political sensibilities of the immigrant communities, which reproduce the gamut of positions to be found in the wider body politic.

Will reports that two different positions had emerged in the black film community about how to deal with this situation. For the Afro-Caribbean video workshop, Ceddo, the concept posed no problems; their strategy was to address a community which they saw as homogenous. Nazareth and the Black Audio-Film Collective, on the other hand, argued that the black and Asian communities were not homogenous, and the idea of reflecting or addressing them was illusory. The problem is revealed in a film like *Passion of Remembrance*, a critical study of the subordination of the issues of sexual politics to antiracist struggle, which employed an experimental style that reminded many viewers of Godard. Will's commentary on this film is pointed; it evokes 'one of the distinctive characteristics of Third Cinema as defined by Gabriel: a cinema which cannot be fitted

34 Will, 'Edinburgh Film Festival', p. 203.

into traditional categories'; accordingly, it resoundingly justifies the contention that Third Cinema could indeed be made in Britain.³⁴ Taylor thought Will was rather too ready to make the claim, and he may be right. *Passion of Remembrance* is one of those films which occupies what Gabriel calls the grey area somewhere between Second and Third Cinema, a film which does not quite connect with a community it cannot quite identify, whose strengths are closer to the avant garde than popular sensibility.

The contradictions which surfaced at Edinburgh in 1986 came partly from the way the conference was set up. Will reported the distress expressed by the North American critic Julianne Burton on her discovery that there were no Latin American filmmakers at the conference to speak for themselves. It is symptomatic of this omission that Will was able to begin his report with the claim that the term Third Cinema was coined by Teshome Gabriel; while Homi Bhabha delivered a characteristic piece of metatheorizing, addressing the distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference from a perspective derived from Derrida, which demonstrated ignorance of the history of Third Cinema in both practice and theory.³⁵ One is reminded that this very journal managed to ignore the existence of both the theory and the practice of Third Cinema until 1983.³⁶ Since many of the positions advanced at the conference were informed by the traditions of *Screen*, the conclusion follows that the conference was indeed in certain measure, as Clyde Taylor maintained, a belated and confused attempt by Eurocentric theorists to come to terms with a cultural force which they had always found somewhat awkward and slippery.³⁷

In light of the development over the last few years of postcolonial theory represented precisely by figures like Bhabha, this judgement might now seem too hasty. The real issue lies elsewhere, in the perennial problem about the relationship, or rather mismatch, between theoretical endeavour and the terrain of praxis. This issue is part of the problem: if the question is the practice of Third Cinema, then this is not conducted according to a theory; it responds directly to everyday exigencies. And this applies to both means and ends, both the political target and the route taken by the process of production.

These exigencies, at the end of the 1990s, are those of a new world order which is not really new at all, but more like the old one with a part chopped out. In the West, Communism has fallen (except in Cuba) and the Cold War is over but it still hurts, like a phantom limb. At the same time, globalization, for vast swathes of the world, is not experienced as a new world ethos, but as the intensification of a process which has been going on ever since they first entered into a colonial state. However, the last few decades have seen the

35 See *ibid.*, p. 198 and Homi K. Bhabha, 'The commitment to theory', in Jim Pines and Paul Willeman (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 111–32.

36 In 1983, *Screen* produced a special issue on Third Cinema which included articles by Julianne Burton and Teshome Gabriel: *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1983) 'Racism, Colonialism and Cinema'. However, two other British film journals of the time, *Afterimage* and *Framework*, both published material on the subject in the 1970s.

37 Taylor, 'Eurocentric' vs. new thought', *passim*.

technological explosion in communications and the media which now goes by the name of convergence, and in this process, in which dominant information and audiovisual production becomes both more embracing and self-referential, the means of production have become cheaper, more accessible and easier to operate, and have altered the conditions for creation in both the margins and the interstices. The means for producing Third Cinema, Third Video, even Third Television, are much greater now than when the praxis first appeared; while the political context has been transformed.

The original Third Cinema was premised on militant mass political movements of a kind which in many places no longer exist, and upon ideologies which have taken a decisive historical beating. The spirit of Che Guevara's Tricontinental Movement has been fragmented. The survival of Third Cinema depends on its origins within the margins and the interstices. Margins and interstices are different but closely related spaces. They are also global in their interconnections. A successful writer, say, from an African country, who is exiled by the regime and comes to live in London, has been politically marginalized but has entered the interstices of cultural life in the metropolis. A successful Caribbean writer who, having lived in London, chooses to return home is returning from the margins within the metropolis to the margins beyond. On the other hand, in the universe of representational spaces in which their work is received, the point of reception is polyvalent. The global conditions of postmodern culture make it possible for margins and interstices across the globe to become aware of each other. This is even more acute in the case of, let us say, a North African filmmaker exiled in Paris who makes a film about the marginality of his fellow exiles which is then seen, sporadically and intermittently, on screens all around the world; or an Argentinian exile who returns to make a film funded by a European television station about the course of the continent's political aspirations. The results is perhaps the extension of Third Cinema into a new space akin to what Teshome Gabriel has recently called nomadic cinema.

This much is theory. Perhaps it is necessary to reiterate the point which Getino made in his Notes on Third Cinema, written ten years after the original manifesto: the value of theory is always dependent on the terrain in which the praxis is carried out. Which suggests that what we need now is a new geography.

reports

Console-ing Passions 6th Annual Conference, Concordia University, Montréal, 1-4 May 1997

For British delegates arriving from the UK on the day of their general election, the warm pro-Blair greetings from many North American participants ('We are so happy for your country!') helped set an especially welcoming tone to the convivial gathering of the sixth annual Console-ing Passions conference. Around the downtown Montréal campus of Concordia University, an unusually rainy Québécois springtime alternated brief periods of bright sun with full-scale thundery downpours, so that delegates' lunchtime dashes for cafes and restaurants were made rapidly, under improvised brolly cover. Up on the seventh floor of the main Concordia tower, the buzz of between-session conversations increased over the four-day conference, as new contacts were made and old connections re-established, creating the distinct sense of the Console-ing Passions conference as an annual rendezvous for a loose but friendly network of scholars and videomakers from both sides of the Atlantic.

The event, as both Ann Gray and Janet Thumin have pointed out in previous reports for *Screen* (vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 418–20 and vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 392–6) now occupies a well-established place in the calendars of those working in feminist video and television studies. The majority of participants and delegates were from Canadian and US universities, with a sizeable minority flying in from the UK. With advance news of the conference publicized through well-managed web site updates, and participant confirmations and programmes posted through e-mail, this participant, at least, had a clear sense of Console-ing Passions being up and running in a virtual sense even before arrival in Montréal.

Offering an ambitious, busy programme of

forty-one panels or screenings, two evening video programmes, a plenary round table and two receptions over the four day schedule, the conference identifies its areas of focus as 'Television, Video and Feminism'. Although some of the more successful panels effectively integrated or reflected upon the relations between this triumvirate, the distinctions which separated the different angles of focus were often more evident than the connections. The split, for example, between 'TV people' and 'Video People' was marked spatially, by the scheduling of screenings and video-related panels in smaller side rooms, relatively distant from the pulsing heart of the coffee-table chatter, and by the reluctance of those scholars involved primarily in television studies to sample either the video screenings or the video practice plenary. This split was exacerbated, perhaps unavoidably, by the decision to schedule both the practice plenary and the new feminist video programmes in sites away from the main conference rooms at the tail-end of busy days: weary 'TV people' being thereby not encouraged to attend screenings or discussions perceived to be outside their field.

The demarcation between television and video was, of course, partly a result of the grand scale and scope of the conference programme: with so much of interest on offer, delegates either had to 'session hop' between rooms, sampling fragments of discussions, papers or screenings, or sacrifice breadth for depth by staying put for the duration of a single session. Whilst it is an exhilarating idea to pack as many papers as possible into a conference schedule (126 contributors and six videotapes distributed amongst forty-one sessions over three days), the sheer weight of numbers, and the restrictions on discussion time which a four-paper session necessitates, left this participant with the sense that less is more. Those panels with only three papers, for example a gripping session on the presentation of different masculinities in 'Masculinity

and . . . ' (contributions from Michael Kackman, Henry Jenkins and Helen Yeates) tended to promote more engaged and sustained debate than those with a full complement of four papers to be fitted into the one and three-quarter hours.

The video/television split could also be seen to manifest a clear contrast in methods of working on these related audiovisual media. Beyond the evident distinction between theory and practice, there were also distinct and often discrete groupings around textual analysis, production histories and audience studies. Whereas some panels seemed closely tied to one particular approach (there were, for example, four panels based explicitly on named television programmes, and the preferred approach taken in the vast majority of papers and panels was text-based), there were a number of panels in which the overlaps between these three approaches were explored very fruitfully. The 'Lesbian/Feminist Autobiography' session, for example, counterpointed textual analysis (Julia Lesage), production history and textual analysis (Katharine Setzer) and a fascinating account of the politics and hidden agendas of independent video exhibition and distribution (presented jointly by Shashwati Talkudar and Karen Lefkovitz). The 'X-Files in Deep Space' session brought together text-based studies (David Sidore, M. L. Harrison) with Sabine Meyer's interesting account of the relations between fans and philologists, contrasting amateur and academic professional modes of appreciation.

This session, like most others in the conference as a whole, was dominated by contributions from young North American graduate students. It was striking how few of the 'big names' of North American media studies actually gave papers at Console-ing Passions. The relatively low number of papers from, for example, members of the advisory board (only two out of eleven of whom actually presented papers, although half chaired sessions) was especially noticeable in

relation to the very many panels which were constituted entirely from graduate papers. Although these contributions tended to be of an extremely high standard, the graduate status of their presenters, in the context of the cut-throat competition for jobs in North American academia, conspired to create an edgy atmosphere in which many speakers seemed acutely aware that their performance was offered up for assessment or formal evaluation by the audience. Some graduate presentations, particularly those that were read at speed directly from a polished written script with a proliferation of thesis-style references, thus had the quality of an interview performance intended to impress possible employers, rather than a public rehearsal of interesting ideas offered for friendly discussion by colleagues. This trend amongst North American conference participants has already been noted by Ann Gray (*Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 418–20) whose criticism of the failure to distinguish between written and spoken registers in the 1995 Console-ing Passions conference is still valid, particularly in so far as a rapid and anxious delivery and subsequently defensive response to questions effectively hampers the development of productive debate. Some especially anxious graduate presentees responded to questions as if they were the objects of interrogation rather than in a supportive environment conducive to interested and informed discussion.

This was, I should stress, not always the case, and many of the young graduate students gave confident and fascinating presentations. The paper delivered by Stacey Johnson, for example, in the 'Home Movies, New Technologies' panel, raised a number of interesting questions on the dual function of home movies as agents of record or domestic entertainment. The discussion following her paper connected very fruitfully with that surrounding other presentations in this panel, providing an encouraging demonstration of how graduate work, when placed in the

context of a well-planned panel, could promote useful exploration around the connections between papers in any single session. Such fruitful interconnection was not always possible in four-paper panels where the links between individual presentations were not clear. The catch-all 'Gender, Gender, Gender' panel, for example, featured a particularly engaging presentation of early work in progress from Gill Branston on pitch, accent, gender and class in the voices of British television presenters, but it also brought together *such* a disparate range of papers that discussion was unhelpfully fragmented and paper-specific. In contrast, the audience response to the 'Networking Women's TV' session, in which individual papers presented historical, theoretical and practical approaches to a closely related range of topics, demonstrated how a neatly dovetailed panel of presentations could generate productive, informed and focused debate.

Overall, the level of discussion and the friendly exchange of opinions and e-mail addresses made this a fruitful and engaging conference event. The highest volume level of chat and good humour was reached during the final conference reception in the minimally elegant surroundings of the newly refurbished Cinémathèque Québécoise. Here, as the business of the conference began to wind down, delegates made vociferous expression of their heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the tireless and charming conference coordinators, Marty Allor and Chantal Nadeau, who had enabled the ambitious programme to run so smoothly. The programme committee of Jane Feuer, Chantal Nadeau, Phebe Chao and Mary Beth Haralovich was also thanked, and tentative advance warning was given for the next Console-ing Passions conference to be held in Sydney, Australia.

Uma Dinsmore

Time and Value Conference, Institute for Cultural Research, Lancaster University, 10–13 April 1997

Leaving a conference usually prompts either relief or mixed feelings. Occasionally, however, a conference touches a nerve, producing a group event that works so well that one leaves with regret. This Easter's Time and Value Conference, held under the auspices of the Institute for Cultural Research at Lancaster University and heralding the arrival of a new journal – *Cultural Values* – was one such. From the opening moments, the sun shone on an event that produced a series of often (though not always) excellent plenaries and panels, together with lively break-times, both of which were notable for an openness and warmth of exchange that characterizes the academic community functioning at its best. Though the quality of a conference speaks volumes about the quality of its host institution – an atmosphere of mutuality and benign, yet challenging, exchange cannot be created overnight – was there something about Time and Value's specific agenda which contributed to its sustenance?

In the plenaries, as well as in the strands, comprising 'the body', 'memory', 'nature', 'politics', 'technology', 'practice' and 'temporalities', I was struck by the extent to which the conference was struggling to articulate *shared* and urgent concerns that cut across – in various and multiple ways – the divides constituted and sustained by identity politics: the threat posed to all our lives by environmental disaster; the impact of postmodern temporal perspectives and technologies on enfranchisement and agency; the relation of death to postmodern temporality(ies); the place of violence in contemporary theory and experience; whether history inevitably repeats; how to reconceptualize 'value' in postmodern terms. Yet although the struggle was to articulate concerns that arguably breach the boundaries of identity politics, the conference's

context of a well-planned panel, could promote useful exploration around the connections between papers in any single session. Such fruitful interconnection was not always possible in four-paper panels where the links between individual presentations were not clear. The catch-all 'Gender, Gender, Gender' panel, for example, featured a particularly engaging presentation of early work in progress from Gill Branston on pitch, accent, gender and class in the voices of British television presenters, but it also brought together *such* a disparate range of papers that discussion was unhelpfully fragmented and paper-specific. In contrast, the audience response to the 'Networking Women's TV' session, in which individual papers presented historical, theoretical and practical approaches to a closely related range of topics, demonstrated how a neatly dovetailed panel of presentations could generate productive, informed and focused debate.

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awareness of contemporary cultural theory guaranteed that there was rarely a collapse into some notion of an undifferentiated 'we'. The working through of this tension, I believe, contributed to the conference's mutuality of exchange and reminded me, once more, of the drawbacks of identity politics.

To an extent, *Time and Value* was itself concerned with posing and problematizing the question that I have posed of the conference. Thus it asked both *how* particular values might be sustained or even carried forward into the future, in the context of specific social, cultural and political threats to those values, but also how such a question might be reframed given contemporary theory's destabilization of the very concept of 'value' and postmodernism's arguable deconstruction of modernity's temporality(ies) – which puts in question the taken-for-grantedness of any narrative chain of events in cause–effect relationship occurring in linear time.

Some papers dwelt on the need to *sustain* values in changing times and temporalities, others speculated upon the likely *effects* of these changing temporality(ies) of our times upon both theory and on lived experience and culture – including values – while yet others sustained a dual focus on the relation between changing values and changing temporality(ies) to produce what were for me the most challenging and thought-provoking papers.

It was both heartening and dismaying to listen to two papers on ecological matters and green politics, a comparison of which might illustrate well how, in different papers, the themes of 'time' and 'value' were variously integrated and weighted to different effect. Phil Macnaghten's admirably clear paper 'Conflicting times in nature', illustratively recounted the findings of focus group research that contested the efficacy of environmentalism's attempts to link the 'global' and the long-term future with the 'local' and the everyday of 'dwelt-in' time. According to Macnaghten, this policy fails to address an experience of ecological issues and

global matters characterized by fatalism: an inability to conceive of the long-term future and a lack of belief that local actions can have global effects. Environmentalism's efforts might be hindered, Macnaghten concluded, by a conflict between the linear temporality of their strategies for the future and an everyday fatalism and helplessness induced by the sheer scale of global pollution, and, most significantly, the impingement of the instantaneous time of multinationals and global corporations upon lived environments. Though Barbara Adam's paper took up similar environmentalist themes and linked speculations concerning appropriate strategies to a consideration of postmodern temporality and agency, her conclusions were more upbeat, for she suggested that though postmodern 'instantaneous' time and the dispersal of 'acts' and 'events' complicate any linear ameliorative programme, the redundancy of notions of discrete cause and effect in this new landscape where everything emerges as connected and mutually implicated can demonstrate our collective responsibility for the environment.

Though Macnaghten and Adam produced radically opposed visions of the opportunities offered by changing conditions and theories, both papers arguably held to some notion of the 'good' linked to care for, and responsibility towards, the global environment. As if in response, Elizabeth Grosz's 'The time of violence: value and deconstruction' offered a reading of Derrida that questioned the possibility of promoting the good without simultaneously invoking a violence that is inseparable from all thought, writing and signification. Grosz suggested, then, that Derrida's envisioning of an equivocal universe where distinctions between violence and 'the law' are of the finest order demands time: time for reflection; time to weigh up these fine distinctions so that local, contingent acts become possible. This *time*, she concluded, is what Derrida theorizes through 'the gift', and, but for the possibility

of this 'gift' – this 'given time' – there would be very little to hope for.

Although Philosophy (understandably) dominated the conference proceedings, there was much to fascinate and inspire *Screen* readers outside, as well as within, the more specifically media-focused panels and papers. Presentations on cinematic and technological memory provided, perhaps, the sturdiest shared ground upon which Media Studies, Sociology and Philosophy could begin to converse, yet I for one found much to inspire outside the 'memory' and 'media' strands. Alphonso Lingis's poetic (and rather grandiose) meditations on the contemporary phenomenology of death and catastrophe prompted questions, for instance, concerning contemporary cinema's imbrication with death, and suggest a fascinating (and as yet unwritten?) study of the cinema and death. Several papers reminded us, however, that time and, by extension, death, need always to be thought in nationally and/or ethnically specific, as well as historically specific, terms. Arjun Appadurai's study of India's contemporary religious battles, for instance, contested the idea of an inevitable postcolonial repetition of modernity's history – an idea that positions the postcolonial subject merely as 'mimic' – by means of an evocative analogy with the ways in which Indian popular cinema's music enters into the aural and temporal fabric of Indian popular culture as 'vernacular percussion' – a process that cannot be understood merely as repetition. For Appadurai, then, contemporary Indian violence erupts at the interface between two incompatible 'orderings' of time: postcolonial 'repetition' and the 'vernacular percussion' of another 'more enabling' repetition.

Like Grosz, Appadurai returned us to one of the conference's dominant themes: that of violence. Interestingly, a reconsideration of violence and the media has marked one halting and very controversial return, within media studies, to the question of 'value'. For

those of us who wish to return more broadly to questions of culture and value, Time and Value suggested a thousand new and difficult beginnings, for it opened the door to a study of value that places equivocation rather than certainty at its centre. I, for one, hope that the critical projects imagined at Time and Value will bear rich fruit in the future.

Susannah Radstone

The 19th International Festival of Women's Films, Créteil, 14–23 March 1997

Throughout its history the Créteil festival has grown in confidence as a documenter of women's cinema. Its remit in this area has frequently been archaeological (with sections on silent film which have mined cinema history to find women's place as filmmakers). This year this was informed by a sense of urgent duty as its special section on Central and Eastern European women directors brought the war in the Balkans (and tribulations in Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Turkey and Albania) to centre-stage. With forty-one films/videos being shown in this section (compared to ten fiction, ten documentary and thirty short films in competition), including three in the main competition, inevitably these war-torn tales provided a resonant and affecting subtext to the rest of the festival. This is one way to explain our perception that overall this year's festival was dominated by death, dying, illness and pain. Those films which showed even a slight sense of humour stood out from the others and (as if the juries felt this too) were frequently the prize winners.

To begin with the lighter moments of the festival, here, in different ways, the strength of family ties were explored by several prize-winners. Both *Captain Pedro and the Three Wishes* (Claudia Nye, UK, 1996), winner of the documentary prize, and *Floating Life* (Clara Law, Australia, 1996),

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feature winner, examined the burden placed on these ties by emigration. Meanwhile, *Fistful of Flies* (Monica Pellizzari, Australia, 1996), awarded a prize by the young jury ('graine du cinéphage'), and short winner (prize by Canal plus) *O Tamaiti/The Children* (Simale Urale, New Zealand, 1996), explored the gulf between parents and children, with both films concluding that the former had much to learn from the latter. Clara Law's best feature prize was her second in three years; but unlike her earlier winner *You Seng* (Hong Kong, 1993), which was a stylish historical epic, *Floating Life* has a contemporary focus: the attempts by a Hong Kong family to settle in Australia. What starts off as a farce of cultural difference (as the older members of the family try to come to terms with Australia), develops into an extremely well-written, nuanced and excellently played tale of family loyalties, betrayals and truths. As with last year's oriental winner, *Xiatian de xue/Summer Snow* (Ann Hui, Hong Kong, 1994), one can only hope that this film secures a general, international release. If not, then the creation of a space where such films by Hong Kong women directors can be viewed certainly seems long overdue.

This year's auto-portrait was given by Carole Bouquet, perhaps best known in Britain for her role in *Trop belle pour toi!* (Bertrand Blier, France, 1989) as the wife whose excessive beauty drives husband Gérard Dépardieu into the arms of his frumpy secretary (played by Josiane Balasko). As in past years (with Catherine Deneuve and Monica Vitti) the gala of the auto-portrait was the festival's most popular night, attracting the French public for a screening of Claude Berri's new film *Lucie Aubrac* (1997).

Beyond this grab at the wider (Parisian) public, the auto-portrait frequently offers a chance to study the actress as auteur and this was the case this year. Perhaps with this in mind Bouquet had chosen several films which went against the grain of her composed

'Chanel' image. As well as Werner Schroeter's *Der Tag Der Idioten/The Day of Idiots* (Germany, 1981), which takes place in a psychiatric hospital, a comic treat was *D'une femme à l'autre/A Business Woman* (Charlotte Brandstrom, France/UK, 1993). The subject of this film were the problems (*à la Working Girl* [Mike Nichols, US 1988]) of being both successful and a woman, a theme shared with the winner of the public prize for best feature; *Female Perversions* (Susan Streitfeld, US, 1996), starring Tilda Swinton. Whilst the successful woman might seem a decidedly 1980s subject, both films treat it with the benefit of 1990s feminist hindsight. For *D'une femme à l'autre* this involves a strong sense of comic irony and a mocking of patriarchal values; in *Female Perversions* we are treated to a psychoanalytic subtext and a frequently avant-garde imagetrack (involving mythic dream sequences to express female pleasure).

The difference between the two films is crystallized by the different actresses. Swinton plays Eve, a young, incredibly successful attorney who is tipped by her boss to be the next judge. Despite her outward signs of success, however, Eve is riddled with self-doubt; afraid of being 'found out' as an imposter, unable to control her male and female lovers and with a kleptomaniac sister. Tilda Swinton is brilliant at playing the unreadable surface, but *Female Perversions* asks us to believe in her character, whilst Swinton replays the impenetrable. *D'une femme à l'autre* succeeds not only in convincing but, more importantly, reveals the real contradictions within which Bouquet playing Kate, the wife of a successful novelist who herself becomes successful, finds herself. Whilst Eve's problems are seen to come from inside her (and indeed it is hard to imagine how she actually achieved her success), Kate's are fabricated entirely by the two men in her life. The opening quotation of *Female Perversions* suggests that, within patriarchy, women cannot 'be themselves' and if they

were to do so they would be seen as 'perverse'. By contrast, *D'une femme à l'autre* shows patriarchy itself to be perverse.

The very real nature of the prejudice encountered by Kate/Bouquet in the film above is an issue elsewhere. In this year's festival programme, Greek director Maria Iliou notes that in Greece 'a woman director is always regarded with suspicion unless her husband is a politician or editor', while Croatian, Snjezana Tribuson, talks of how 'most women directors who work for television in Zagreb make educational programmes'. Ghettoization or isolation emerge as the twin fates of women trying to make films in non-western societies, which is to put into perspective the space women directors occupy in Western Europe and in France in particular. The festival programme included these statistics: since 1930 Central and Eastern European women have made two hundred films; since 1994 French women have made forty films.

As usual, then, French presence at the festival was well represented. The first weekend featured a gala of French women directors who were taking part in a section called 'Cinéma Français D'Aujourd'hui'. One might have hoped that past disappointments with French women directors appearing at Créteil (when they have more or less dismissed any notion of a 'women's cinema' to endorse instead a gender-neutral 'auteur' model) would be challenged by the presence of eight of its rising stars (including Judith Cahen, Catherine Corsini, Eliane de Latour, Claire Denis and Claire Simon). However the organization of both this section and the gala night put paid to this. 'Women's cinema' was again under attack: each of the ten directors was asked to invite a young filmmaker, and six out of the ten chose a man. Meanwhile the gala was accompanied by a screening of a short film which had been made in order to protest against the restrictions on immigration in France. In the ensuing discussion, this short film and the issues it raised completely

upstaged the directors, who sat patiently yet painedly on the stage.

If events such as the above only serve to reinforce the distance between women working in French cinema and those working elsewhere, then the programming of the Central/Eastern section exacerbated this gap. While for French women directors the auteur model still dominates, the festival did not allow such a model for its Central and Eastern European directors. Jackie Buet, the festival organizer suggested in her introduction to this section that the idea of the auteur is fundamentally problematized by cultural crises, yet rather than exploring such a problematic the section was organized around breadth rather than depth, showing only one film from each director and thus denying any possibility of auteurship.

As previously mentioned, Central/Eastern films also challenged viewers in official areas of the festival: main features in competition (*Prepoznavanje/Recognition* [Snjezana Tribuson, Croatia, 1996]) and shorts in competition (*Home* [Andrijana Stajkovic, Yugoslavia, 1996]) which won the prize for best foreign short. *Home* epitomized many of the works in this Central/Eastern section: it is carefully directed, simple and yet searingly effective. It begins with a medium close shot of a couple. Both appear to be in their seventies, and are undertaking various daily rituals: making tea, playing cards, preparing food. Throughout, the camera remains tightly focused; then after five minutes the camera very slowly zooms back to reveal the rest of their surroundings: a large hall with endless bed spaces in which other families are undertaking similar tasks. The resilient preservation of private space amid the uprooting chaos of war is effectively conveyed in this film which, like many others, whilst stripping cinema style, is neither primitive nor poor. When such films are shown alongside the slick competition offerings one must inevitably shift one's vocabulary. The necessity and urgency of all

films in this section were, indeed, stunning, as despite the battered status of the war zones, their directors managed to produce accomplished work which was overpowering in its message.

One example which displayed a mastery in the handling of mood and light was the short, *Tihovanje/Quietude* (Mirjana Vukomanovic, Serbia, 1992). In this film a monk, high up in the mountains, whose life is measured by the growth of his beard and the clicking of his prayer beads, is far removed from the battlefields. By contrast, more directly addressing western (pre)conceptions of the Balkan war as a minor war with minor casualties was *To Europe with Love* (Mirjana Zoranovic, Bosnia Herzegovina, 1994). This documentary about a hospital throws images of death at us: burned corpses, a closeup of a face blown away, the death of a little girl, a frantic, hopeless resuscitation, followed by a shot of her dead eyes. Though potentially a relentless and numbing display, these disturbing pictures are hard to dismiss since they come to us through an artful and deliberate sequencing, demanding attention even as they produce grief.

As well as these native images, foreign views of the Balkan war were also offered. *A Balkan Journey* (Brenda Longfellow, Canada, 1996) captures how contemporary communication techniques (such as the internet) create sisterhood between Sarajevo and the USA. The documentary style which governs this film gives it an intimacy with its subject, something denied to *Black Kites* (Jo Andres, USA, 1996), winner of the public prize for best short film. This film, made completely in the USA, gives war a slick, postmodern treatment. It collages avant-garde and mainstream techniques as it reworks the writings and paintings of an artist trapped under the theatre in Sarajevo, eking out a life by learning how to wash with earth instead of water. Though this film could have been clichéd, curiously it gained power from its context in the festival: the Sarajevo theatre

was a frequent reference point in the documentaries.

The collaborative *Calling the Ghosts: a Story About a Rape, War and Women* (Mandy Jacobson, Karmen Jelincic, USA/Bosnia, 1996) concerns women's experience of a Serb concentration camp in Omarska. Rape is present through absence – no closeups or action shots disturb the horror of what for these women is the unrepresentable. The body becomes the political – the tormentors assume that their victims will never talk about an act which in effect destroyed them as social beings. The women have to grasp the medium themselves, after being faced with an insensitive, sensationalist western media machine, only interested in sexualizing their experiences. Whilst happy endings are out of the question, there is evidence that this work has had political effects: since 1996 rape has been included in the catalogue of war crimes. *Calling the Ghosts* sits alongside films such as Helke Sander's *Befreier und Befreite/The Liberator and the Liberated* (Germany, 1991–2) as a testament to women's own battles in times of war. What both films suggest is that the scars written invisibly on the body and the mind can be made visible through the cinema.

At other moments in the festival the issue of trauma was addressed through the merging of technology and bodies. *Naisenkaaril/Gracious Curves* (Kiti Luostarinen, Finland, 1997), the winner of the public documentary prize, explored internalized imprisonments, mixing the personal, the humorous and the beautiful: values of youth, slimness and health corset contemporary women as much as whalebone did their ancestors. *Unbound* (Claudio Morgado Escanilla, Canada, 1995), which shared the public prize for best foreign short with *Black Kites*, uses a similar strategy of naming the specific to show a 1995 version of bra-burning: women of all ages and ethnic identities let go and embrace gravity with a hearty sigh. If *Unbound's* cry for corporeal freedom originated in the 1970s,

more recent cries for freedom were well in evidence at this year's festival too, and, in the end, the dominant voice belonged to the Central/Eastern films whose images, which demand to be seen, challenge male-dominated narratives of the war. Once again, the Créteil

festival is to be congratulated for providing a space for the unspoken to be said and the invisible to be seen.

Cathy Fowler and Petra Küppers

review:

Elizabeth Fox, *Latin American Broadcasting: from Tango to Telenovela*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 1997, 144pp.

Foro Hispánico vol. 10 (1995), 'Ibero-América y el cine'. Amsterdam and Atlanta GA: Editions Rodopi, 1996, 163pp.

CATHERINE GRANT

Despite their shared concern with Latin America, these two books, which landed in my lap courtesy of their publishers and *Screen*, could not be more different: the first, the latest in a long line of excellent studies of Latin American media history, policy and theory by US-based researcher Elizabeth Fox; the second, a special issue of a Spanish-language academic journal entitled 'Ibero-America and Cinema',¹ edited by Francisco Lasarte and Guido Podestá with contributions from a variety of scholars based in the Netherlands, Belgium and the USA. Nonetheless, given the changing pedagogical and publishing contexts, beyond Latin America itself, of 'Latin American film and media studies', they do both inspire questions that may be usefully addressed by a joint review: namely, who and what are they for?

As with her previous studies, Elizabeth Fox's latest book offers a combination of comparative (and theoretical) analysis as well as separate accounts of the history of broadcasting industries and media policies in eight Latin American countries, from the mighty Brazil and Mexico to the marginalized and fragmented development of radio and television in smaller nations such as Uruguay. The sexy subtitle of the book *From Tango to Telenovela*, which initially seems to connote coverage of broadcasting 'content', turns out instead to

1 'Ibero-America', here denoting Spain, Portugal and the countries in Latin America which were colonized by these two nations, is one of a number of contentious 'shorthand' terms in circulation among academic Hispanists.

refer, rather elliptically, to the overwhelmingly historical focus of *Latin American Broadcasting* from the early 1920s to the present day. In the early chapters it becomes clear that Fox is keen to correct what she sees as an over-emphasis in other studies of Latin American media on the historically determining influence of international relations (imperialism, foreign capital, technology) on the Latin American industries. Her revisionist impulse stems in part from a political interest in leaving open the possibilities for future democratizing change in domestic media structures:

Latin American broadcasting is not an atavistic product of poverty, underdevelopment, or tyranny, nor is it an exclusive product of US imperialism. . . Latin American broadcasting industries are the product of a complex interplay of strong and weak domestic governments and markets, authoritarian and populist policies and largely excluded social forces (pp. 5–6).

This political view is underpinned by Fox's equally pragmatic approach to theory. She neither subscribes to the Marxist-inspired dependency framework (with its economic determinism) nor to realist theory (which sees political concerns as paramount). Both these approaches, in her view, overestimate the importance of foreign influence and are 'largely unable to consider plurality, differences, and conflicts within receiving (or sending) societies' (p. 12). As for 'liberal theory', Fox scathingly notes that 'free markets do not guarantee democracy or the open marketplace of ideas when faced with domestic authoritarianism' (p. 131). Despite her eventual criticism of each of these approaches, Fox's initial descriptions of them are both clear and compelling, with a student readership in mind. Her own preference is to go beyond the 'flat' views of national culture offered by Marxists and realists and to build on the highly influential work of Néstor García Canclini and Jesús Martín Barbero on the processes of mediation in communication and culture, and the formation of hybrids that occur in the interaction of foreign and domestic cultures. I would like to have seen more discussion of Canclini and Martín Barbero's work beyond the brief mention it merits in this book.² Nonetheless, Fox regards it as only of limited usefulness to her focus, providing important insights at the level of the community or individual, but not helping to address the impact of foreign/domestic interaction on a national, industrial level in broadcasting.

While Fox's theoretical discussion is interesting, and she does largely succeed in her aim of beginning to build a new theoretical framework for Latin American media studies in which the space of complex domestic mediations comes to the foreground, the most compelling parts of her book, for me, were the chapters on individual countries. In these chapters Fox examines the domestic forces and interests behind the development of eight national radio

2 Their work, together with the wider debates about popular culture in Latin America, are brilliantly explored in William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1991).

3 Her first book in English was an edited collection: *Media and Politics in Latin America: the Struggle for Democracy* (London: Sage, 1988).

and television industries. Some chapters are, inevitably, more successful than others. Those on Mexico and Brazil, countries with very powerful private media monopolies, are particularly strong, as is the chapter on Chile, its national broadcasting institutions in a state of transition. There is a clear commitment to bringing discussion of each country to as up-to-date a point as possible with quite good coverage of the latest developments in satellite and cable technology.

This is only Elizabeth Fox's second book on Latin American media in English.³ Like the first one, it displays great powers of synthesis and translation of a vast range of media studies material by someone with a huge first-hand knowledge of the field acquired in a number of different Latin American countries. According to the publisher's copy distributed with Elizabeth Fox's study, 'this book would be appropriate as a text for an undergraduate course on Latin American media, or history, and as a graduate course book on comparative communications and politics'. Certainly the style of writing (largely jargon-free) and its structure (divided up into very short subsections within quite short chapters) confirms this. In addition, because of its historical focus which foregrounds discussion of the domestic or national influences on media development, Fox's book speaks easily to those working more generally in the area of Latin American cultural studies, unlike, it has to be said, other dependency, or realist theory-fixated English-language studies of Latin American communications policy.

Like Elizabeth Fox's book, the special issue of *Foro Hispánico*, 'Iberoamérica y el cine', also sports what seems to be an ever-so-slightly deceptive title. Produced in celebration of the international centenary of cinema, the essays, written by scholars based in Hispanic studies or modern languages departments, do not all approach the 'theme' of cinema in the same way. In their introduction, the editors explain the disparities as follows:

The articles gathered here approach Ibero-American cinema from different perspectives, although they share what might be called an interdisciplinary and contextual focus. Their purpose is not to study the films in question from an exclusively technical or formal perspective, but to analyse them as the representation (or the result) of historical and political processes which have been fundamental to the cultural development of Ibero-America. Comparisons between cinema and literature occupy centre-stage . . . underlining the very close relationship between these two means of artistic expression in Ibero-America [my translation, p. 7].

This statement of intent provides quite a neat summary of what is one of the dominant modes of 'film studies' in many Spanish and

Latin American studies departments (and, I would hazard a guess, in other university languages departments too). Many academics involved in delivering 'film courses' with similar (though certainly not identical) rationales on undergraduate degree programmes, myself included, feel very ambivalent about it. On the one hand, it is a matter for celebration that a displacement of canonical and pedagogical boundaries has taken place, promoting classroom exploration of non-literary cultural forms. Furthermore, the complex mediations between film form and cultural and political 'contexts' can provide fruitful areas of investigation for some of our research, ones which are usefully inflected, I would argue, by the experience of teaching others how (and what it means) to become 'fluent' (in all senses of that word) in and with specific Other cultures. Yet, when it comes down to presenting (or 'using') film in this way to undergraduates, the relative marginalization, not only of 'film as film', but also of the very film courses themselves, as just one of the many elements which make up the modern languages degree programme, causes many problems. Reading this issue of *Foro Hispánico*, published, as it is, in the *lingua franca* of international Hispanism, I fully expected at least some of the articles to come from and to address this familiar, troubled context. But I was also interested to see if the work published here would speak to a 'film studies' audience, or even to a section of the media studies/cultural studies readership of Elizabeth Fox's book.

Only one of the articles in this very literary volume on cinema bases itself entirely on literature. The remaining six articles engage with literary texts to varying degrees. This literary focus is not necessarily a problem in and of itself. But what is unfortunate about some of the essays in this collection, the ones which, for example, tread the well-worn path of analysing film adaptations of literary/historical texts, is that they are underwritten by familiar concerns of 'faithfulness' to or 'deviation' from the 'original', yet seem unaware of, or uninterested in, the debates which have gone on in film studies and elsewhere about these concepts. There is also considerable variation in the amount of critical engagement with film in these pieces on adaptation. For example, Jorge Ruffinelli's essay on María Luisa Bemberg's film *Camila* (Argentina, 1984), in which he discusses Bemberg's feminist deviations from the historical and literary records of her true-life heroine's exploits, contains very good analysis of the opening sequences of that film. Meanwhile, Eduardo González's comparison of *Fresa y chocolate*/*Strawberry and Chocolate* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea/Juan Carlos Tabío, Cuba, 1994) and the text (by Senel Paz) on which it is based, is a fascinating Lacanian-influenced essay on homosexuality in Cuban culture, and a powerful assertion that Alea's film 'heterosexualizes' what was a very queer story, but does not really mention the film much.⁴ A different approach altogether to cinema's use of literary texts is

4 Unlike the wonderful essay on this film, 'Cinema as guided tour', in Paul Julian Smith's book *Vision Machines: Cinema, Literature and Sexuality in Spain and Cuba, 1983–1993* (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 81–98. Smith's study covers the same ground and more, but roots the argument in brilliant analysis of the film.

5 John King, *Magical Reels: a History of Cinema in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 191–8.

6 See, for example, Robert Stam and Randal Johnson, 'São Bernardo: property and the personality', in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam (eds), *Brazilian Cinema* expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, 1995), pp. 200–215, 200–201.

7 Recent collections of work on Latin American cinema have been in English, including the very good issue of *Iris*, no. 13, (Summer 1991), 'Latin American Cinema' and the excellent volume edited by John King, Ana M. López and Manuel Alvarado, *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

performed by María Elena Soliño in her very good piece on maternal iconography in Spanish director Pilar Miró's film, *El pájaro de la felicidad/The Bird of Happiness* (1993). As well as discussing the way in which *El pájaro* punctuates the different stages of its plot with a poem and a painting, Soliño very usefully situates Miró's film in a context of post-Francoist representations of motherhood in Spanish cinema.

For me, though, the remaining three, much less 'literary' articles are, if not the best essays in the volume, the better ones on film. Leonardo García Pabón's study of the work of Bolivian director Jorge Sanjinés, in particular his 1989 film *La nación clandestina/The Secret Nation*, while it does not add a great deal to John King's notable discussion of Sanjinés's films,⁵ has a very good, well-contextualized discussion of Sanjinés' theoretical writing and, in particular, of his justification of the use of the long shot ('plano secuencia integral'). Luis Madureira's essay on Nelson Pereira Dos Santos's *Como era gostoso o meu francês/How Tasty was my Little Frenchman* (Brazil, 1971) is an excellent discussion of this film and its connections with the philosophical project of Brazilian literary Modernism. While other authors have explored the link between Cinema Novo and Modernism before,⁶ here Madureira goes much further in his very detailed reading of *Como era gostoso*. Finally, my own favourite in the volume is Laura Podalsky's truly wonderful study of two films from 1950s Argentina – *Después del silencio/After the Silence* (Lucas Demare, 1956) and *El jefe/The Boss* (Fernando Ayala, 1958). These films, which were produced after the collapse of the first Peronist regime, also coincided with the collapse of the Argentine studio system. Filmmakers were prompted by this development, and by the need to attract new audiences, into using exterior locations on a large scale and, for the first time, using imported wide-screen technology like Cinemascope. Podalsky's study, far too complex to summarize here, takes in sophisticated and contextualized readings of the two films, Argentine literary and philosophical debates about the representation of the space of the city, and the author's highly original research on the Argentine cinema industry at this moment of crisis. It is a model of informed interdisciplinarity.

With some excellent articles, then, this issue of *Foro Hispánico* makes its own notable contribution to Latin American cinema debates. The fact that it is a Spanish-language journal is, for example, particularly significant.⁷ But is the work on film produced in the context of Spanish and Latin American Studies departments of any note beyond that context? The obvious answer is yes, when, as the better contributions to Lasarte and Podestá's volume show, it engages with film as film, and can show itself to be as knowledgeable about film and cultural studies debates as it is about social, political, philosophical and literary matters. It is, in many

ways, still early days. Foreign film study only became feasible as a general part of modern languages degrees, albeit in a limited way, when video technology offered advantages to the university teacher in terms of the 'transportability of the target culture' similar to those of studying foreign books. Further developments in technology (satellite, digital and on-line resources) will bring more change to our curriculum in their wake, perhaps making it more likely that (virtual) target-culture media studies can be incorporated into our courses in ways which have not been possible before. Both of the books examined in this review provide snapshots of the current situation in two different, but increasingly connected, academic fields – 'Ibero-American' studies and Latin American media studies. Differences between these and some other fields are beginning to be outweighed by shared theoretical concerns, and a healthy respect for 'interdisciplinarity' and 'subject specificity'. These will be interesting times.

review:

Paulo Antonio Paranagua (ed.), *Mexican Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1995, 321 pp.

Randall Johnson and Robert Stam (eds), *Brazilian Cinema*, expanded edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 491 pp.

MICHAEL CHANAN

Very occasionally, in film festivals or late-night movies on channels prepared to show films with subtitles, we get glimpses of films from the continents of the South. Frequently they shine with the vision of another kind of cinema from the fodder of the mainstream, whether Hollywood or Independent, North American or European. Very occasionally such a film breaks through into commercial art-house distribution – like Idrissa Ouedraogo's *Yaaba* from Burkina Faso (1989), or Alfonso Arau's *Como agua para chocolate/Like Water for Chocolate* from Mexico (1991), where they fascinate and puzzle audiences in equal measure, their lucidity and visual beauty matched by their strange view of the world, their different attitude to narrative and its rhythms, enfolded by the symbols and metaphors of other cultures. Yet these films are not isolated wonders. They are the products of industries mostly either small or medium scale, and one or two large ones, which, while they represent *in toto* a considerable part of world film production, are kept from our screens and our awareness by the monopoly practices of the major distributors, the disdain of the exhibitors, and the disregard of the film reviewers.

These two books, therefore, share a common problematic, as well as a common endeavour: that of presenting to the English-speaking reader an account of a national cinema of which the reader is almost

entirely ignorant. The situation is only a little better in North America, where the large Spanish-speaking market means that more Latin American films are available on video than in Britain, but they still represent a tiny and arbitrary selection of the hundreds of titles discussed in these volumes. Both books are hugely informative, but cannot resolve the problem. The difficulty which these films present to western interpretation stems from the First-World viewers' loss of their normal privileged position as decoder and ultimate arbiter of meaning, and, in many cases, from the film's resistance to the dominant conventions of metropolitan convention.

However, as Paranagua comments in his introduction to *Mexican Cinema*: 'One cannot write the history of world cinema by focusing only on the pre-eminence of fiction films in the industries of the hegemonic film-producing nations within the international distribution system'. The possibility of other cinemas in Latin America belongs to a history which now goes back almost as long as the recently celebrated century of cinema. From earliest days, the demand for films was so great that there was practically no country capable of producing enough to satisfy the domestic market, except for, after the First World War, the USA. Cinema, in these early days, was for this reason an international market which allowed the development of production centres not only in the hegemonic, that is, metropolitan countries, but also in a number of underdeveloped ones, where they grew up in locations favoured by large national or regional hinterlands, like Bombay and Cairo; or in Latin America, in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. The economic base of these industries is always weak and unstable, but for much of the time a certain level and continuity of production was possible, especially when the State took an interest, as Peron did in Argentina. In fact, State support for cinema in one form or another is not uncommon in Latin America, but it sometimes leads to strange results, like the paradoxical alliance in Brazil in the 1970s between the radical film movement which flourished in the 1960s, and Embrafilme, the film agency set up in 1969 by an authoritarian State in order to promote the image of Brazil abroad.

Two important factors here are, first, that the most successful Latin American films regularly displace international (read Hollywood) successes at the top of the box office in their own countries, but they do not usually get a chance anywhere else because of lack of distribution; and, secondly, precisely because the costs of production in these countries are low, there is sometimes room for aesthetic explorations that are almost impossible where the industry is better capitalized. In Brazil, the most significant moment of this type was Cinema Novo in the early 1960s, the subject of the bulk of the volume edited by Randal Johnson and Robert Stam.

Both books have appeared before, *Brazilian Cinema* is an expanded version of a book first published in 1982. Its editors are

North American scholars with a long-standing interest in the subject. The update consists in two additions, a piece on the period from 1960 to 1990 by one of the editors, and a chapter on the shape of Brazilian cinema in the 1990s by three writers including the other editor. Both are valuable additions. The book is divided into three main sections. The first is made up of contributions by leading filmmakers, including Carlos Diegues, Glauber Rocha, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Robert Farias and others; these writings are vital to the appreciation of the special and peculiar susceptibilities at play within Brazilian cinema. The second section contains critical pieces on several important films of the 1960s and 1970s by directors such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Ruy Guerra and Glauber Rocha. This section will be the most frustrating for many readers, as they realize what marvels of cinema have been forbidden them. The third section comprises polemics and debates by leading Brazilian critics like Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, Jean-Claude Bernadet, and José Carlos Avellar. The editors claim that the volume is not an anthology, in the sense of a survey of material already published. Nevertheless, in at least one case it suffers from the tendency of anthologies to abridge their source material. This is particularly regrettable since the item in question (which is not, as far as I know, available in any other English translation) is the crucial essay by Salles Gomes entitled 'Cinema: a trajectory within underdevelopment', one of the most lucid brief expositions of the problematic of Third-World cinema which I know. The abridgement is particularly senseless since the complete essay is not more than twice the length of the short version printed here. The book, however, is an important one, and the new edition is to be welcomed.

Mexican Cinema is a revised version of a volume which first appeared in France. The BFI brought out the English edition with help from IMCINE, the Mexican Film Institute, to coincide with a large retrospective of Mexican cinema at the National Film Theatre in London. The editor, Paulo Antonio Paranagua, is a Brazilian scholar based in Paris who until recently directed the annual Latin American film festival in Toulouse, and has also edited similar volumes for the Centre Pompidou on Cuban and Brazilian cinema, both of which also deserve English editions. The excellent translation of the present volume is by the Cuban-born US film scholar Ana López, but the publisher's copy editing is careless, errors and inconsistencies have crept into the otherwise solid documentation included in the volume. The writing collected here is frequently impressive. Critic and screenwriter Tomás Pérez Turrent contributes three essays – one of them on Buñuel in Mexico – and Carlos Monsiváis, one of the country's leading cultural critics, has two. The first dissects a series of myths about Mexican cinema; the second, which discusses the character of its relation with the audience, delivers, in a few pages, a sociological analysis of the impact of

cinema as a symptom of modernity more penetrating than many a book and not just applicable to Mexico.

Mexican cinema goes back almost as far as cinema itself.

According to Aurelio de los Reyes, the early Mexican cinema, forged in the conditions of the Revolution, developed greater skill in the second decade of the century in the construction of narrative documentary than filmmakers in North America. Indeed they were the first filmmakers anywhere to develop what he calls 'a local vernacular form of representation of contemporary happenings'. The 'golden age' begins in the mid 1930s, signalled by the first great Mexican-made commercial success in Latin America, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* / *Over on the Big Ranch* by Fernando de Fuentes; the subject of a fascinating essay here by Emilio García Riera. It continues after the war, and between 1949 and 1989 annual production figures reached a hundred features or more some sixteen times; although in 1991, the year of *Como agua para chocolate*, it plunged to a mere thirty-four. Mexican cinema has always suffered from the double problem of general subordination to the economic conditions of underdevelopment – which places it in jeopardy when the country collapses into foreign debt, for example – but also from its status as a presidential football, its governance therefore changing every six years. But in Brazil the situation was even worse. Following the extinction of Embrafilme in 1990 by Collor de Mello, Brazil's first democratically elected president since 1960, by the mid 1990s barely a dozen feature films went into production in the course of a year, the lowest figure since the early 1940s. New measures were, however, introduced in 1996 and production has now picked up again.

Both Brazilian and Mexican cinema display genres and styles often derived from Hollywood models but strongly adapted to the national culture. Mexican melodrama, for example, or the *ranchera*, are genres with their own delights, conventions and history, which scholars have recently been rediscovering; while *Como agua para chocolate* belongs to a patchy tradition of the Mexican Revolution on screen which begins with the revolution itself. There are several essays on these topics in Paranagua's book, including a suggestive piece by Andrés de Luna on the fictional reconstruction of the Revolution. On the one hand, he observes, the whole of Mexican cinema is filled with allusions to historical figures and events; on the other, history was a headache for the producers, because 'at stake was the establishment of a paradigm or a conceptual model that would serve as the official version of the events'.

For Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, the genius of Brazilian cinema is its 'creative incapacity for copying', which is responsible for some of the most original contributors of any country of the South to world cinema. But at the same time, it remains a cinema of underdevelopment. This has aspects both aesthetic and economic.

1 Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes,
*Cinema: trajetória no
subdesenvolvimento* (Rio de
Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra,
n.d.), p. 80.

Thus the peculiarly Brazilian popular genre of the *chanchada* was possessed of a relationship with the audience 'incomparably more lively than the corresponding foreign product'. In the latter case, the relationship entails the passivity of the consumer, while the *chanchada* involves 'an intimate relationship of creative participation'. The universe of the Hollywood movie is distant and abstract, 'while the rudimentary fragments of Brazil proposed by our films at least described a world lived by the spectators' in which 'the mass enthusiasm for the rascals, scoundrels and loafers of the *chanchada* suggested a struggle of the colonized against the colonizer' (the original, first published in 1973, has *ocupada contra ocupante*).¹ At the same time, says Salles Gomes, while the cinemas of North America, Europe or Japan have never been underdeveloped, those of the Third World have never ceased being so. In cinema, as in other regards, underdevelopment is not a stage or a step, but a state of being, a condition; the films of the developed countries never went through this condition, while the others have a tendency to remain stuck there. Hence, one might add, the constant wonderment to which these two books stand testimony, that in Latin America, cinema refuses to die.

review:

Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (Film and Culture Series). New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 320 pp.

Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption* (Consumption and Space). London: UCL Press, 1996, 241 pp.

STEVEN COHAN

These two books represent well the concerns of contemporary masculinity studies in analysing visual representation as more than a self-contained textual system. Of the two books, Studlar's is the most central to film studies. It is an impressive accomplishment, skilfully melding archival research with analyses of silent film. *This Mad Masquerade* documents the historical coordinates of masculinity during the period from 1915 to 1930 with the aim of tracing 'the circulation of meaning created around a selected group of male stars': Douglas Fairbanks, John Barrymore, Rudolph Valentino and Lon Chaney. During this era, Studlar explains in her introduction, 'American masculinity negotiated various social and sexual dilemmas of the time. These included the perceived rebellion of women against sexual and domestic norms, the ethnic threat of new immigrants, and the alteration of middle-class lifestyles by modern industrial economics.' Studlar's concern as a historian, in examining 'the extratextual materials that were used to create stardom for the public's consumption', is to investigate 'the broader historical field of American culture', documenting how the social tensions of the era are evident in the production, promotion and reception of male stardom. Her concentration on gender amplifies those tensions by

highlighting how the four stars selected for analysis mark important transgressions of 'normative masculinity' (p. 5).

Studlar organizes her book so that her separate discussion of each star's career crosses similar chronological terrain, demonstrating how each star considerably differed as a screen icon in the way his image orchestrated masculinity around a unifying trope that embedded his star text in specific discourses circulating through the culture at the time: Fairbanks and the character-building boy-culture reform movement; Barrymore and the matinee idol of late Victorian theatre; Valentino and the ethnically inflected dance craze of the 1920s; Chaney and the freak show exhibition. Far from being just a set of visual motifs, each trope identifies 'the most important cultural influence on the meaning of the star profitably shaped by the industry discourse and then pleasurably experienced by film spectators' (p. 7). This approach then focuses Studlar's careful, richly documented analysis of the social currents brought to bear upon and, more crucially, mediated by each actor's star image.

In organizing her discussion Studlar neatly pairs her four exemplary case studies in order to examine perceived differences in gendered spectatorship, with the first and fourth chapters (on Fairbanks and Chaney, respectively) examining stars whom the industry assumed addressed a male audience, and the second and third (on Barrymore and Valentino, respectively) studying ones whose appeal was presumed to be directed to females. Aptly dramatizing the crosscurrents at work in the construction of all four stars, this structure allows Studlar to weave the larger intertextual fabric of competing masculinities that concentration on a single star might not otherwise recognize. The chapter on Fairbanks, for instance, is the longest in the book, because, as well as analysing his relation to the 'boy-centered reform movement' linking his stardom to the values of 'physical regeneration and optimistic moral action' evocative of Theodore Roosevelt (p. 25), it also establishes the cultural premisses against which the other three stars were made intelligible as alternative formations of masculinity.

Fairbank's star image would appear to be the least problematic of the four, yet Studlar's discussion is fascinating, attending closely to the conflicting social currents that the actor's films attempt to reconcile. She reads the Fairbanks star text, as evident in his films and as redefined by the fan magazine discourse, as a complex response to perceptions of 'an increasingly bureaucratized, industrialized, and, therefore, "feminized" America' (p. 25), itself underscoring strong concerns about modernity. With its character-building discourse, the boy-culture ideal attempted 'to achieve the ideal merger of traditional moral values associated with feminine tenderness and altruism with the "masculine primitive" of rugged physicality and instinctual impulsivity' (p. 33). The strategies of Fairbanks's films, particularly as they shift from the gender reform

narratives of the 1910s to the more escapist adventure tales of the 1920s, foreground how his star image visualizes such an impossible merger while disavowing the middle-class anxiety that it invariably articulated.

With its comparable emphasis on the male body, but one inflected through the grotesquery of the freak show, Chaney's star image – 'pitched to the audience as rooted in his willingness to be constructed, each time anew, for his films' (p. 239) – inverts the terms of Fairbanks's: in their similar revelations of 'man-made' masculinity, each star effectively represents different sides of the same cultural coin. Whereas Fairbanks naturalizes his self-made masculinity through his celebrated body, Chaney offers pleasure in viewing the body as theatrical artifice placed on exhibition, and his star image consequently relies upon a different cultural intertext for its codes of representation, acknowledging 'the freak show's tacit agreement that everything is constructed – nothing is what it seems' (p. 248). Constructed as 'a radical negation of the Fairbanksian ideal', Chaney thus 'came to represent a masculine difference that turned him into a suffering object' (p. 201), resulting in films that base their narratives not in the genre of horror (as one typically recalls), but in male melodrama, with its valorization of 'a redemptive, masochistically romantic' masculinity (p. 213).

The two chapters on 'woman-made' male stars, Barrymore and Valentino, offer an even more compelling account of the diverse cultural discourses operating upon 1920s male stardom. To analyse Barrymore, Studlar starts with his stage career, linking his importance as a matinee idol to the phenomenon of late-Victorian theatre's 'matinee girl' and the corresponding 'belief that women as consumers were altering masculinity' by encouraging 'the creation of fictional ideals of masculinity that, in turn, negatively influenced real-life men' (p. 92). Turning the issue around, Studlar examines the relation between the resulting eroticization of the male star on stage and 'a demandingly expressive feminine desire' (p. 94). Barrymore's silent films, by comparison, are more paradoxical in their use of 'the materiality of the body', since they proclaim while disavowing 'the "natural" attraction of sexual difference' (p. 128). Their strategy is to be fully 'aware of the value of eroticizing the male body for a female audience, but they accomplish this through means which complicate our notions of what it means to represent a man as an erotic object' (p. 131). Body language and photographic effects customarily used for female stars allude to Barrymore's stature as a matinee idol, an 'ambiguously gendered' woman-made object (p. 111), but, in contrast to his breathtaking stage performances, his films also place him in narratives that 'masculinize' his body insofar as he 'often make[s] stereotypically masculine attempts at dominating others, emotionally, physically, or sexually' (p. 132). In this regard, his later career is characterized by efforts to tame his eroticized body

by conforming it to the Fairbanks ideal of muscular, physical action. Nonetheless, Studlar concludes, even his later costume films 'remain transgressive as important articulations of the social and sexual discontent of their historical female audiences' (p. 147).

Valentino, the least ignored of this era's stars, makes the contradictions inherent in Barrymore's star text even more volatile. Studlar's original reading of Valentino emphasizes his powerful connection to dance and its inescapable inflection of dangerous, sensual ethnicity. She first demonstrates how 'Valentino's dance background was a significant factor in shaping his textual and extratextual construction (and reception) as a male matinee idol for women', particularly as it figured 'in his representation of a transgressive masculinity that seemed beyond cultural recuperation' because of its ethnic challenge to the perceived homogeneity of American males (pp. 153–4). Offering subtle analysis of his 'remarkable' choreographed movement, which 'suggests a semiotics of physicality virtually synonymous with notions of dance as a traditionally feminine mode of expression', Studlar then shows how the narratives of Valentino's films provide him with 'a vehicle for masculine transformation into a utopian feminine ideal' (pp. 190–91).

What unifies these disparate stars, Studlar argues throughout, are their comparable projections 'of *transformative masculinity*, of a paradigm of gender construction that, in many different guises or "masquerades", foregrounds masculinity as a process, a liminal construction, and even a performance' (p. 4). More simply put, the discursive constitution of each star 'reveal[s] the underlying assumption that men were made – not born' (p. 249), a revelation that resonates with the various cultural intertexts of theatricality that she cites as the informing framework for reading the star imagery of these four 'masqueraders'.

This Mad Masquerade is an important achievement for the burgeoning field of star studies. Amply illustrated with almost a hundred evocative, provocative stills, and impressively documented by interdisciplinary research that draws on the popular press, advertising, theatre and dance history, as well as film culture, this well-written book offers insight upon sight, and shows the way for future historical examinations of Hollywood stardom as the crucial point in which the industry and the culture meet to continually negotiate, around the site of masculinity, the larger social issues that shape both representations of maleness on screen and the public's enthusiastic response to it.

While not concerned with film or stardom, Sean Nixon's *Hard Looks* takes a somewhat similar approach to considering the constructedness of masculinity through visual representation. Deploying a Foucauldian mode of analysing representation through technologies of looking, and a somewhat simplified version of Barthesian semiotics, Nixon studies the 'new man' so central to

British advertising in the 1980s (and inaugurated with the famous Levi 501's television and cinema advertisement featuring model Nick Kamen). Nixon shows how the 'new man' broke with previous media constructions of maleness but stresses its continuity in encoding 'an assertive masculinity' (p. 200) in '[t]he display of men's bodies and the continuing centrality of certain physical attributes (notably, developed chest, arm and upper-body muscles and highly groomed hair and skin) across a wide range of representations' (p. 5).

Like Studlar, Nixon places this new image of masculinity in its intertextual framework, situating it alongside 'developments in the design and selling of menswear', 'the coding of shop space', the globalization of the advertising industry, and the emergence of the 'style press' and 'general interest men's magazines' (p. 125). Nixon is particularly interested in the encoded visual address marked out by the imagery of the new male, which, he argues, '[was] not new ... but rather reproduced ways of looking associated with the emergence of characteristically modern forms of consumption' (p. 71), as typified by the continually interrupted gaze of the late-nineteenth century *flâneur* strolling the city street. 'What was distinctive about the "new man" imagery', he concludes, '... was the space it represented for the display of masculine sensuality, the sanctioning of a highly staged narcissism ... and the coding of sexual ambivalence – especially in the organization of spectatorship' (p. 202).

Nixon's book, rather archly written so as to keep repeating the various stages of its thesis, amply documents the institutional settings of this new configuration of masculinity but stops short of considering the broader cultural, social or economic forces complicit in this imagery of self-absorbed, youthful, male consumption. To be fair, that is not Nixon's intention, since, as a staunch empiricist, he wants to resist moving 'too quickly from a formal reading of representation to inferring shifts in lived culture' (pp. 206–7). His book nonetheless keeps raising questions in my mind about the historical currents to which this male imagery and its merchandisers were responding, ranging from feminism and gay liberation, to Thatcherism's privatization and unemployment, to postcolonial challenges to Anglo hegemony. Furthermore, his study would have benefited from considering how the imagery circulated by advertising and magazines was quickly incorporated into film and television (in the USA, Richard Gere's *American Gigolo* [Paul Schrader, 1980] immediately comes to mind). In any event, *Hard Looks* makes frequent allusions to film theory without fully recognizing, as Studlar's book documents, the complexity with which the male body has been a central feature in twentieth-century visual representation. The 'new man' of the 1980s may have been dressed by Armani and not afraid to shop or be looked at, but his ancestry can also be traced back to Fairbanks and Valentino, not to mention 1950s stars such as Clift, Brando, and Hudson.